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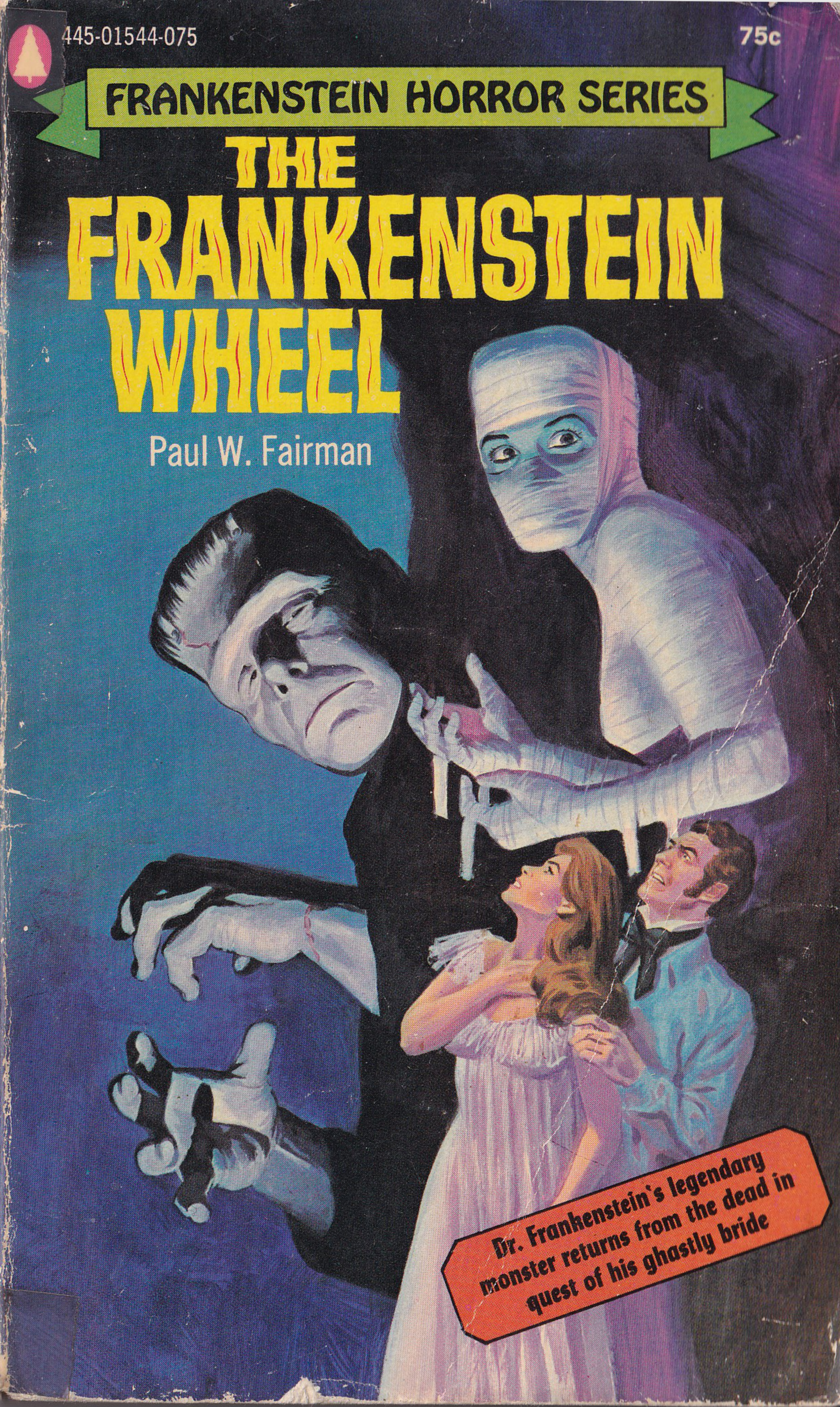
FRANKENSTEIN HORROR SERIES

THE FRANKENSTEIN WHEEL

Paul W. Fairman



Dr. Frankenstein's legendary monster returns from the dead in quest of his ghastly bride

MONSTER LOVER

With his great hand, the fiendish creature took her by the shoulder and lifted her as he would a doll. He held her high and peered into her face. He saw that she was beautiful—and terrified.

Then he lifted his other hand and she saw to her horror that it was larger and had a more deadly look than the hand grasping her shoulder. The great fingers curled into a giant claw as she began to scream and cry for mercy!

THE FRANKENSTEIN WHEEL

Paul W. Fairman

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To
Mary Shelley

One Hundred Fifty Years Later

Like one who on a lonely road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round,
Walks on,
And turns no more his head,
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

—Coleridge
The Ancient Mariner

I have supp'd full with horrors.

—Shakespeare
Macbeth

FOREWORD

To say that I, Henry Roger, came by chance upon the horrors I now recount is to give only superfluous thought to the nature of things. Many have said that chance is all, that all human patterns are thus begun, thus fashioned, and thus ended.

In choosing to believe otherwise, I feel that I am closer to the basic truths than those who see life as but a mere patchwork of existences signifying nothing. What it does signify is quite another matter, another argument. But I do maintain that I was selected, perhaps for no other reason than that of Mary Shelley's Robert Walton, or Melville's Ishmael—to tell thee—to recount in detail, the grisly incidents and events that went to make up the second turning of the Frankenstein Wheel.

The second turning. If that reference is cryptic, please bear with me. It is not mine. It sprang from the incredible brain of the fiend himself and was etched indelibly upon my mind at a time when my very reason tottered.

BOOK ONE:

THE PURSUIT

The Madman

The year 18—— was a particularly active one for me. The death of my father, Lord Cecil Roger, the previous year, had thrown a great burden of responsibility upon my shoulders. Coming into a title is not a commonplace occurrence; and that, accompanied by the flood of grief I experienced, made the load doubly burdensome. My father and I had been very close and the loss of him was a heart-tearing shock.

To call the fact that he left his affairs in lamentable shape a blessing may seem ridiculous, but it was true. Had I been eased into a smoothly functioning inheritance, I would have had more time to contemplate my loss and indulge in self-pity. As it was, the problems of straightening things out presented themselves starkly and I was forced to meet them head-on. My father had been a dreamer, a poet, and a painter of sorts, a lover of field and sky and beauty, and thus hardly the man to administer a vast estate.

Therefore, by the time I had gotten things straightened out and found a capable overseer, the spring grasses had softened the harshness of my father's grave and the sharp edge of my grief had been dulled.

It left me also somewhat at loose ends. A wanderlust seized me and I took off for warmer climes. I spent a brief time in southern Italy and then moved north into Switzerland and eastern France where the grandeur of the snowy peaks and rushing rivers filled me with awe and somehow compensated for the loss that still depressed me.

I must admit that my mood was unhealthily morbid because I was finding morose pleasure in somber aspects. I had recently read a poem, *Thanatopsis*, by the American, William Cullen Bryant, and the poet's lines haunted me as I beheld the might and power of seemingly uncaring nature.

. . . When thoughts
Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
Over thy spirit, and sad images
Of stern agony and shroud and pall,
And breathless darkness and the narrow house
Make thee to shudder and grow sick at heart . . .

The American had consolation for all this later in his poem, but I was not interested. When I realized this I knew it was time to take myself in hand, so I quitted the melancholy realms and returned to familiar haunts.

Still the wanderlust was upon me and I tramped the

more familiar hills and valleys of England, Wales, and Scotland, and it was while I refamiliarized myself with the streets of Edinburgh that I remembered with pleasure the name and history of a friend.

Leland Welch and I had gotten on excellently at Cambridge. Then Leland, ambitious to the core, had repaired to Vienna where he sought out a psychologist named Freud who, according to Leland, was making some startling progress toward solving the mysteries of the human mind. The thing Leland and I had in common, I believe, was inordinate curiosity. But with a difference. His was channeled, disciplined, while mine went helter-skelter in all directions. As a child, I could wonder for hours about the mysteries of the planets or the fantastic abilities of the hummingbird, but instead of applying myself to the task of learning such secrets, I would soon be off on some other track.

Not so with Leland. He wondered about the human mind and held to that course with a fine single mindedness. And now, in Edinburgh, I recalled Leland and hoped he was still where I had last known him to be, practicing his new mental arts at the Queen's Hospital. He was.

There is no point in describing our reunion other than to say it was mutually delightful. We had dinner together that very night and I enjoyed listening to the irrepressible account of his past, present, and what he saw as his future.

"A new world opens for me every morning, Henry. The multiform world of the human mind!"

There was much of this, but I hasten to the segment

of our discussion through which I became involved. This was introduced by Leland's statement: "It is truly amazing—the fantasies, sometimes pathetic, sometimes humorous, sometimes horrible, which originate in distressed minds."

"Horrible?"

He threw me a piercing glance. "Why did you light on that one, Henry?"

"What do you mean?"

"I said pathetic, humorous, and horrible. You ignored the first two, but sparks of interest appeared in your eyes at the latter."

This annoyed me. "Just a minute. Are you trying to —what is that strange word you used?"

"Psychoanalysis?"

"Yes. Are you trying to psychoanalyze me?"

He laughed. "Forgive me. It is difficult to remove my profession with my jacket. But since you showed an interest, what would you think of a man who saw his dead beloved being carried through the night by an incredible monster while the same girl was in her grave?"

"I'll grant you the horror aspect. But there was certainly more to it than that."

"Naturally. This particular patient is now in restraint, under my supervision."

"And what are your plans for him?"

"I shall dig into his mind and find the source of his nightmare delusions."

"You're sure they are delusions?"

"Henry! Really! You have the true layman's penchant for the romantic. In this case, I am probably

stretching the word beyond its meaning, but I think you understand."

"You said there was more to it."

"Indeed there is, but the subject is hardly one for a pleasant dinner. If you are truly interested, you may talk to the patient and judge for yourself."

"I would like to."

"Very well. His name is Max Gregor. He is a native of one of those particularly bleak Orkney Islands to the north of us. Gregor is a stolid, rural type, and those islands are melancholy at best, so it seems natural that his hallucinations should be in keeping."

"You say he is under restraint?"

"In a locked-off section of the hospital, but only to keep him from wandering away—he is not bound in any manner. In fact, when you talk to him, you will be struck by his apparent sanity."

"A sanity you do not accept, however."

"Nor will you when you hear his tale. . . ."

I presented myself at the hospital the next afternoon, where Leland greeted me with some surprise. "You actually came."

"Of course. That was our arrangement, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but I really didn't think your interest was genuine."

"It is quite genuine."

He gave me one of his piercing looks as he murmured, "Too much so, possibly." But before I could voice my annoyance, he added, "Very well. Come this way. I'll take you to the patient."

Leland ushered me to a small room, bare except for

a table and two chairs, and a few minutes later Max Gregor was sent in. He was a slow-moving, solidly built man who had once, I was sure, had the leathery bloom of cold, northern environments upon his cheeks. But now those cheeks were possessed of a deathlike pallor, with a look of death and emptiness in his eyes.

My unpracticed regard found him sane enough, however, and when I frankly stated, "I am not a medical man and there is no reason you should talk to me if you do not so choose," he shrugged his shoulders and replied, "I have no objection, sir."

"Then tell me a little about yourself."

"There is little to tell. I am a simple man who has led a simple life. I am a fisherman, or was. But no more. They refuse to trust me beyond this hospital, much less upon the billows, for fear I will do away with myself."

"Perhaps for the time being that is the wisest course?"

I formed the statement gently into a question, not wishing to antagonize him.

"Perhaps," he replied wearily. "They say I have become a madman. Possibly they are right. Here in this place so far from my native island I wonder myself if it really happened."

"There was a girl, I believe. Your betrothed?"

If his eyes had been empty before, they were doubly so now; an emptiness that bespoke desolation and despair beyond measure. When he spoke, it was to himself rather than to me.

"Lenia. So beautiful. So full of life when I left her."

"You went on a voyage?"

"Almost to the Grand Banks, we went. We were after cod but our fortunes were poor and the skipper, Nels Amunsen, resolved not to return without a full hold. He was Lenia's father and in a way I was like a son to him. The weeks passed and when we finally returned to port it was to find that his daughter, my beloved, had passed beyond reach of our yearning arms."

"How tragic!"

"Consumption of a swift and terrible nature took her away."

"I am sure," I said, still gently, "that the sympathy of a stranger—"

He did not hear me. His gaze remained fixed on the wall beyond. "It was a fearful loss," he said, "but one to be desired in the light of what followed."

"I don't understand."

"If Lenia could not be in my arms, better she were safe in her grave."

The very simplicity of that statement made it terrible. A chill crawled up my spine, a sense of horror that would not have resulted from the same words shouted in the hysteria of madness. The simple words of a simple man who had come to terms with the unspeakable; but at what price?

The manner in which I pursued my inquiry, driven on by curiosity, should have shamed me. Later, it did, but at the moment I could not retire with so much left unanswered. I continued to question him even though his replies were slower in coming and the process became tedious.

Later, with the complete conversation still fresh in my mind, I put his story down for future reference, deleting the repetitions and extraneous material. The following, in essence, was what the poor unfortunate said.

"I wandered disconsolate over our island, all ambition drained from me. I sought consolation from the pounding sea and the inconstant sky. I watched the clouds form and reform and saw her dear face everywhere, while shunning company and seeking the buffetings of nature herself. But the cold rains were slow in tempering the fever of my grief and I am sure I became a concern to my friends and those who loved me.

"Time, however, worked its healing way, and I finally accepted the cruelest loss a man can experience and reconciled myself with frequent visits to her grave where I kept fresh the flowers our wilder countrysides afforded.

"Then, upon a certain night, I awoke from my sleep, from a bad dream perhaps, with a renewed yearning for her dear presence. In lieu of that impossibility, I left my bed and went under a full moon to her grave. There I found a peace I had not known since I had gotten word of her death when coming off the sea.

"I do not know how long I knelt there but finally, with the moon lowering, I started back to my hut over high ground which abutted the shore.

"It was then that I saw her—Lenia—on the beach below me. She was running, her hair and white gown

streaming out behind her, her dear face elevated against the wind as she fled along the sand.

"Total consternation fair stunned me. I refused to believe my eyes—what they told me—that down there on sands silvered by the moon, my dear one was risen from her grave to speed like a lovely wraith along the beach.

"But after the first shock I rejected any sense of wraith or ghost. My eyes were far too dependable and the distance was not great. What I saw was not a shade. It was my living, breathing beloved with the joy of life aflame on her beautiful face. Her arms were outstretched as she ran, flung to the dark heavens in sheerest joy.

"I cried out, 'Lenia! Lenia!'

"She threw a quick and radiant glance in my direction but ran on.

" 'Lenia!' I cried again. 'Stop! Wait for me!'

"I hurled myself down the slanting bluff unmindful of rock or thorny brush. I landed heavily upon the beach and came to my feet and pursued her.

"As I ran I did not see the apparition that was to dash my hope into nothing. The sea was on my left and it was out of the sea that he arose; reaching me just as I reached Lenia so that the three of us came together at once. And so horrible was the creature that I froze in my tracks.

"He was of immense proportions with the face of a mummy, yet made even more horrible by the animation which gave it an expression of a demon released lately from hell. His extended arms, though huge in proportion to his great torso, did not seem to be

mates; nor did the clutching hands belong on the leather-skinned wrists to which they were attached. The head was misshaped in relation to the bestial neck and there were ghastly seams in the skin where it appeared some demented physician had been at work.

"Had the situation been different I would no doubt have run screaming into the night. But I had found my beloved and I would not be denied. I hurled myself at the monster as his corpse's fingers clawed out in her direction.

"It was futile. Insane courage could not stand against the monster's strength. One of the beamlike arms swung in a half circle as my hands touched the clammy flesh of his throat. The arm smashed against my chest, lifting me from my feet and hurling me backwards. I fell to the ground, gasping for the breath that had been knocked from my body. Certain that my ribs had been crushed, I still struggled to regain my feet. I failed, falling back again, and was subjected to the unspeakable torture of seeing the monster seize Lenia, fling her over his shoulder, and flee back into the sea from which he had come.

"By the time I regained the use of my body, swift strokes of his mighty arms had put him beyond reach of my eyes. Only the lowered moon, the gloom of night, and the ever-sounding sea remained.

"Recovering the use of my limbs, I ran full-tilt to the village, howling as I went. 'Wake up! Lenia is alive! She was carried off by a monster! Come! We must search the islands!' "

At this point the poor creature I had put under such cruel strain by insisting upon his story collapsed in his

chair. He did not fall to the floor but sat with his arms hanging, his head on his chest. His words now came in a hoarse whisper.

"They judged me mad. They refused me a boat, taking me instead, in full pity at my condition, to Lenia's undisturbed grave. When I became violent, they put me in chains. Now, here I am."

At that moment Leland returned. He scrutinized his patient with a professional eye and spoke briskly. "That's quite enough, I think. You've worn the poor chap out. I'll return him to his bed."

The few instants that followed were of vital importance—because I now agreed with Leland. The man was mad. Overcome with grief at the death of the one he loved, his mind had gone unhinged, leaving him open to hallucinations.

But as he arose obedient to Leland's command, he paused and looked into my eyes. "Please help me," he murmured. Then his shoulders dropped and he shuffled off after his keeper.

It was as though his pleading eyes had become lenses through which I was able to look into the very depths of his tortured soul. Had not this swift rapport occurred, my whole channel of thinking would have remained as it had been and I would have gone my restless way and left the poor wretch to his.

But now, further investigation was imperative. As I said to Leland when he came back from depositing his patient and we walked together out of that miserable place, "Mad or not, he certainly believes his own story."

"Oh, they all do," Leland replied with the cheerful

mien he was forced to nurture along the helpless creatures he tended, or go mad himself.

"I imagine so. And no doubt the vast bulk of what your patients describe to you are hallucinations. But all of them? Could not some small percentage be accounts of true happenings? Those of Max Gregor, for instance?"

Leland laughed. Then, in fear that he had offended me, he laid a quick hand on my arm and said, "My dear Henry, forgive me. Your feelings in the matter are not unique. When first faced by madness, witnesses without exception lean toward belief—that is, unless the stories are too utterly ridiculous."

"And you feel Gregor's tale falls into that category."

His fingers gripped my arm warmly and fell away. "What do you think?"

I certainly could not defend the man in the face of Leland's professional knowledge, so I kept my peace. Actually, I did not hold him sane myself, but a certain compassion I could feel as a fellow human being—something which was denied Leland as a professional—held my final decision in abeyance. Further investigation seemed imperative. The reason for this, I told myself, was that very compassion. However, it may well have been my natural curiosity and need of a direction in which to turn my restless feet.

At any rate, I took leave of my friend Leland and, without informing him, booked passage northward on a coastal vessel—past Aberdeen, past Kinnaird's Head, past John o' Groats—my destination, the cold and desolate Orkneys. . . .

The Gravedigger's Story

There are some seventy islands in the Orkney group, stretching from Caithness and the Pentland Firth to the North Sound and beyond. Only a handful are inhabited, most of them stemming out from Mainland, the largest island of the group. I was deposited there, in the town of Kirkwall and sought local transportation.

Discreet inquiry at the Edinburgh Hospital had gained me the name of Gregor's island. It lay farther north, beyond Stronsay, a smaller island called Eastray. Having some skill on the water, I rented a small skiff and set out alone for my destination, arriving off a calm sea at the village of Larswall about ten o'clock in the morning.

There was a tight little harbor with several fishing boats moored to a solid dock and fishermen going briskly about the tasks of seamen ashore.

I moored my skiff and straightway asked a rolling-

gaited native where I might find the magistrate. He looked me over curiously but was civil enough as he directed me to a house in view from where we stood, the most imposing structure in a group of unimposing dwelling places. "Dave Tander will be the man you want."

I presented myself and found Tander to be a small, rotund man who had certainly worsened physically since he'd manned a fishing boat, if indeed he ever had. He was courteous and obviously a person of intelligence and some education. I introduced myself and was immediately invited to a cup of tea.

I had debated what approach I would use upon arriving in Larswall and had decided that complete frankness would be the best policy. So I explained things to Mr. Tander over our cups—detailed them exactly as they had transpired.

When I finished, he shook his head with the smallest of sad smiles. "Poor Max. We took it very badly here —what happened to him—but it was understandable. He was always a dreamer, was Max, and the loss of that sweet lassie was a blow to all of us."

"My interview with him at the hospital was heart-rending."

"I'm sure it was. Sending him there—literally into a prison—tore at our own hearts. But it seemed best. Cures in cases such as his *have* been accomplished, we were told."

"Then there was no substantiation of his story here in Larswall?"

Tander's smile deepened and I got the uneasy feeling that he was pitying me as well as Max Gregor.

"Proof that a dead lass left her grave to dance on the beach under a full moon? Hardly."

"You did not feel it necessary to open the grave?"

"To what purpose?"

My uneasiness deepened. I seemed to have put myself in the position of defending a wild hallucination. "I thought perhaps—in order to satisfy yourselves completely—"

"My dear Mr. Roger," Tander said in the patronizing voice he had every right to assume, "it was not necessary. The grave had been in no way disturbed."

My teacup rattled in my saucer as I said, "I'm afraid I present myself in a rather bad light."

"Not at all, not at all," Tander replied heartily. "We are happy to have visitors on this benighted island for whatever reason. You must stay with us a while as my guest."

"You are most gracious."

His blue eyes twinkled, revealing a merry strain in his nature I had not previously noted. "You may even search for poor Max's friend to your heart's content."

"Please—"

"Forgive me. I am an outrageous host. But the monster was real in a sense."

"What sense?"

"As a grotesque explanation, you might say. It has no connection whatever with poor Max, but one of our less reputable townsman took advantage of his story in a disgusting manner."

"You interest me."

"Your interest will fade quickly, I fear, when I tell

you. The person I refer to is Sam Lenz, a creature the village would do well without. He lurks on the edges of our society scratching a miserable living where he can. He digs graves—scavenges the beaches for salvage. No doubt he will accost you for alms before your leave-taking, but once given, he will sneer at you and show his yellow teeth."

I was surprised at seeing a man of Tander's obviously sunny nature reflect disgust in that manner. Lenz, I decided, must be reprehensible indeed.

"Why is such a person allowed to roam free on your island?"

"He breaks no laws that we are aware of. And no man can be put away on suspicion under Anglo-Saxon justice."

"In what manner did he become involved in the Gregor affair?"

"None whatever, except, as I said, to take advantage of it. He appeared at the local tavern with a strange coin, a gold piece which the suspicious proprietor finally identified as an ancient French piece called a Louie, I believe. At any rate, I saw to it that Lenz was questioned as to where he obtained the coin. He sneered at me, as was his usual wont, and replied that Gregor's monster gave it to him for services rendered."

"What sort of services?"

"That question was not asked. There seemed no point in allowing the scoundrel to pile lie on lie and thus make a mockery of legitimate inquiry."

"What were the results?"

Tander shrugged. "There were none. Possession of

the coin was not a breach of law, so I could only discharge the blackleg and warn our constable to keep an eye on him."

"Where might I find this man Lenz?"

Another shrug was forthcoming. "Everywhere—and nowhere. If he does not choose to be seen, you could hunt our hills and crags for a generation with no results."

"A rather discouraging aspect."

"Perhaps—perhaps not, good sir. You might obtain results by merely making yourself available. I suggest you take in our countryside, roam at will for a time. As a stranger, you might interest Lenz."

If the man had methods of making himself invisible, I did not see quite how the constable could "keep an eye on him." I did not press the point, however. Instead, I took advantage of the magistrate's kind offer of shelter and wandered the cheerless, five-mile island. In case Sam Lenz preferred solitude, I sought it also, searching out the lonely, wind-swept hills and shores where there were only gray, scudding clouds and complaining waves to keep me company.

The ploy worked. On the very first day of my wanderings I stood in the shelter of a crag looking out over the cold North Sea, when a whining voice broke my reverie.

"G'day, guv'ner. Be ye waitin' fer me?"

I whirled, struggling to keep my composure. "And why should I be waiting for you, sir?"

Calling him *sir* was a concession he did not deserve. Tander had described him well: the sort of creature which automatically stirs revulsion. His deeply

seamed face was twisted into a permanent sneer. His yellowed teeth were exhibited as though he thought them pearls of great price. He was small of stature, giving the impression that he could have slipped easily into a rat hole. He was dressed in black, in garments he might well have received at birth, so disreputable were they in his mid-years.

"Why, guv'ner? Now let's not be coy one with t'other. Yer here in quest o' mad Gregor's yarn, now be'n't ye."

I agreed with the wretch—that there was no point in being coy as he put it. Nor was I particularly interested in how he had obtained his information concerning me. "You are quite right," I replied. "But how does that concern you?"

"Because if that's yer quest, matey, I'm the bucko t'see. I had traffic with Gregor's fiend, that I did."

"Why should I believe you?"

His sneer merged with a look of anger and his eyes, small black buttons, bored arrogantly into mine. "Just like the rest, aren't ye? Nabobs lookin' down on common folk. Very well, a curse on ye and good day." With that, he turned and began to shuffle off.

"Just a moment. I merely asked the question."

When he turned back, only the sneer remained, and he was chuckling deep in his foul throat. "That's better, guv'ner, much better. Now do we do business or don't we?"

"What sort of business?"

"The story, matey. The tale of Gregor's monster."

"Then the creature does exist?"

"I'd be hard-pressed t'tell ye 'bout 'im if 'e didn't, now wouldn't I?"

"Very well, tell me what you know."

" 'Thout compensation? Well hardly!"

"Tell me what you know and I will then decide what your story is worth."

"Easy there, matey. Easy. This be'n't hardly a time o' mutu'l trust now, be'n't it? Honesty on me own part—thank ye and a few farthings on yours."

"Then what did you have in mind?" I demanded tartly.

"Fifty pounds, guv'ner. Fifty English pounds."

"Before I even hear your story?"

" 'Fore ye read it."

"Read it! Are you claiming the intelligence to—?"

He sprang back with a snarl. "A pox, ye bla'gard!"

With that, he whipped a sheaf of foolscap from his pocket. "Just like the rest. Ye see me an ign'rant clod. Not hardly. I had me book learnin' as a lad." With that, his anger faded into a triumphant leer. "Lettin' 'em think me a clod's to the good while makin' me pile. But that's over, matey. Now I've got it and it's me fer sunnier climes and a gentle life."

"I understand you came by some gold pieces."

"That I did," he chuckled as he tapped the foolscap. "It's all down here in ink and quill. If yer a mind t'buy, me passage is paid t' the Carib islands. If not, I'll do very well without ye."

Educated or not, he was sly as a fox. Playing on an interest that had brought me to this bleak place, his bold approach only whetted that interest, something

he well knew. If he merely gulled me with his offer, I would be out fifty pounds. But if I refused him, I would spend long nights wondering if it had been an honest offer.

"I shall think it over," I said.

He shook his head decisively. "Not hardly. I take a ship with the tide. No more of this place for me. It's now or never, guv'ner."

His leer of triumph as I handed over the money was proof of his certainty that I would do just that. And my admiration for his skills as a scoundrel made me wonder why it had taken him so long to acquire his pile. Transferring the foolscap to my hand, he touched his aged stovepipe hat jauntily and said, "One last word o'good advice, guv'ner. It's just that ye take yer interest in the fiend vi-car'ously, not face t'face or God help ye."

With that he was gone, slithering backward like a lizard to blend with the blacks and grays of the ridge beyond and then to disappear.

I stood there for a time, pondering the experience I'd just gone through. I had put the foolscap into my inner greatcoat pocket and twice I half-withdrew it. But neither time did I have the courage to face possible proof of idiocy on my part. If I were to find that I'd been gulled I knew that I would not breathe a word to the magistrate. A man does not like to acknowledge himself a fool among strangers. But if I had been cheated while able to still lay hands on Lenz I would have been sorely tempted to reveal our meeting regardless. Therefore, it was through such devious reasoning as this that I did not examine the document

until I was safe in my room that night—well after the tide upon which Sam Lenz claimed he would embark to sunnier climes. . . .

A quick perusal of the document presented me with a new puzzle. The neat, though somewhat crabbed hand. The surprisingly able rhetoric and composition. How could a man of now-obvious education masquerade as a near illiterate for so long and with such consummate skill? This was merely a passing question, however. Lenz had entered my life swiftly and departed with equal speed. I could only hope our paths never crossed again. With this thought in mind, I settled down to read my fifty-pound purchase. And I was extremely gratified to find that Lenz had got straight to the point.

"He came with the storm that tore the island that week in March. I was in my hut when the structure shook to its foundations from a great pounding on the door. I opened it and he stood there, a sight to behold.

"Oh, what a bonny lad was this one, you may be sure! A towering monster I first saw as a mistake of my vision; a misshapen animal. When he lowered his head and entered the hut I knew my error. No animal except some nightmare beast could have been put together in such fashion.

"No, he was a nightmare man instead, constructed of spare parts taken from human giants. His head was shaped not like any head I had ever seen, nor did the eyes belong, nor the jutting nose, nor the blasted-out hole of a mouth. His shoulders were of greater width

than my door so he had to turn to enter and then the vast shoulders hunched down to keep the flattened top of his head from touching my ceiling.

"Yet I feared him not, for in all my years on this earth I have feared neither man nor devil. So I stood in no terror of this mixture of both who had come to me out of the storm. It was only with awe that I asked his mission.

" 'You are the gravedigger?'

" 'Aye.'

" 'I have work for you.' And he threw several gold pieces down.

"I had expected guttural rumblings bereft of all intelligence. This was not the case. His voice was deep as befit his great cavity of chest and torso, but the words came clearly, even with a certain refinement of tone and pronouncement.

" 'This is no night for work of any sort,' I replied.

" 'There will be time. Now you must come with me.'

" 'I shall stay where I am.'

"My refusal was sincere enough. I would have fought any effort to get me forth upon such a night. But resistance was useless. He seized my arm and dragged me forth as though I were a child's doll. Outside the rain came down in icy torrents, drenching me as I was hauled to the shore and thrown like a bundle of rags into a boat.

"There, having consigned myself, I huddled in the prow and strove to make my coming death as comfortable as possible. He seated himself at the oars and there followed such a voyage as no man could con-

ceive of. We should have been swamped in minutes but we were not. He pushed the craft into wave after wave until I was sure we had passed earth's end and were now driving madly toward the River Styx with Charon waiting to assign us to our own circle of hell.

"Then we beached and again I was lifted and dragged. We entered a dwelling of which I had no knowledge save to know it was on one of the upper islands because the howling gale came straight from the Pole and we went into the teeth of it.

"The place was larger than my hut and was furnished with strange-looking tanks, pipes, and oddly shaped devices. Once inside, the monster pushed me toward a corner where a pile of rags afforded some comfort against the hard floor beneath. 'Rest,' he said. 'The storm will pass. Then there will be tomorrow's darkness.'

"I crouched there, far from sleep, and watched as he sat down at the table and began pouring over notes and papers strewn there. So intense were his studies that he forgot my existence. I followed the changing expressions on his inhuman face. When puzzled, he emitted growls of complaint. Then, when a point clarified, he smiled like a happy death's head and crooned with delight.

"He appeared to alternate between two tasks: the solving of problems and an occupation more to his taste. He would work with figures and symbols. Then, usually after a period of great tension with vexing problems, he would turn to the other and write swiftly onto the pages of a green-bound journal, but now with no hesitation or doubt.

"Finally, I could hold my silence no longer and demanded, 'Why have you brought me here?'

" 'As I said, I have work for you.'

" 'But to come for me on such a night—'

" 'I prefer nights when others fear the storms and sit by their fires.'

"That was understandable. There would have been more than one case of sudden madness in the village if this creature chose to walk abroad by the light of a full moon.

"Finally, exhaustion drove me to sleep and when I awoke daylight came in the narrow windows and the monster, still at his papers, lifted his head and motioned me to my feet.

"He led me to an adjoining room where the sight which confronted me was shocking even to one of my earthy calling. The room was filled with dismembered bodies. Arms, legs, torsos were piled neatly on shelves and numbered with small tags.

"However, the sight was not so grisly as it would have been if the human remnants had been fresh from recent deaths. Rather, they were old and dried, like parts from mummies out of an ancient Egyptian tomb.

" 'Take all of these away,' the monster said. 'Bury them.'

"That seemed too disagreeable a task to start before breakfast. But upon seeing the room I began to wonder what sort of a meal this creature would put together—upon what meat he himself subsisted, and whether or not it would be presented to his guests also.

"Therefore, I did not mention breakfast, but went to work as I had been bidden. It took most of the day to bury the contents of that room, after which I was so in want of food that I could not forbear making my needs known, whatever the menu.

"Providentially, the creature's needs were normal in that respect and we supped on a corn gruel and a sheep shank which had been turned over the open fire.

"My host, or master, whichever, was most taciturn. After the meal he indicated with a gesture and a grunt that I was to clear away the dishes. I washed them in water from the rain barrel outside, thoroughly drenching myself in the process, as the rain had only slightly abated.

"It was while accomplishing this chore that I had a truly frightening experience. I had filled my bucket and was rounding a corner of the house when a bolt of lightning suddenly turned the night into day. This in itself was no great surprise. I had seen and lived with lightning many times before. But this bolt appeared to change direction in the sky and form a jagged path directly down toward the house.

"This led to the upper tip of a pole jutting up from the ridge of the roof, an extension well beyond the chimney which I had not noticed before, what with the storm, the rain, and my preoccupation with burying the dried human parts. I noticed it full well now. The lightning exploded with the thundering of cannon. It was as though a writhing snake of fire had taken the tip of the pole in its teeth and was seeking to tear it from its moorings.

"The bolt finally died and I rushed back into the

house to find the creature in high agitation. One section of the strange equipment consisted of a panel upon which dials of various sizes and shapes were placed. Several of the needles on the dials were now spinning wildly and a strange blue light flared from another piece of equipment consisting of tubes and bottles.

"The display was most alarming but the monster's delight was a thing to behold. He danced up and down and clapped his huge hands together and uttered guttural sounds which could have come only from an ecstatic animal.

"It was these contrasts in the creature that held me on the knife's edge. I knew he was highly literate and could speak like a man of great learning. Then, under the conditions mentioned, he could revert to childish ecstasy.

"He obviously regarded me as an underling, speaking to me only in the sparsest manner when something was needed, ignoring me the rest of the time. I debated fleeing the house many times but being aware of his great speed and stamina, I had not the courage to try.

"His whole manner changed after the demonstration of the dials. He became more cheerful, more brisk. A short time later, after darkness fell, he turned on me suddenly and said, 'We need food. Show me a herd of kine.'

"The demand puzzled me for a time. Then I asked questions, and as a result, we got into the boat and he rowed with swift strokes back to my native island. We approached from the northern side and I led him

to a pasture land where one of the few herdsman our island boasted kept a dozen cattle in a back pasture. They were gentle beasts and showed no fear as we approached. The monster (I never learned his name) selected one, a smallish bull. He grasped the animal by one of its horns and, with his other hand doubled into a fist, smote the beast a single great blow at the base of its skull. Thus instantly slain, the beast fell in its tracks, whereupon my monster casually lifted the carcass, a weight of at least thirty stone, and threw it over his shoulder. We returned to the boat and I was unnerved at the fear of our swamping what with the added weight piled into the frail craft. The monster's skill prevented this and we returned to our lonely island where he again occupied himself with the strange paraphernalia there in the house.

"Toward evening of the next day he became more excited than before. He suddenly shrieked, 'Eureka! The final problem is solved.'

"With that, he seized my arm and threw me halfway across the room—not with any rancor, merely as a result of his enthusiasm.

" 'We must hurry,' he said, 'or we will not be ready for the next storm. Come.'

"Treating me again as the veriest lackey, he hauled me to the boat. We returned to my native island, but not this time to open pastureland—to the graveyard, rather, where I was finally told of our mission.

" 'I need the bodies of females lately dead,' he told me.

" 'My God!'

"He pushed me in rough impatience and demanded,

'Female bodies, I say! You would know. In this harsh climate, those perhaps two months dead but no longer.' When I hesitated, he seized my arm. 'Tell me! Tell me! Before we lose the moon's light!'

"In order to keep the bones of my arm from being crushed I said, 'Some forty days ago, a ship foundered on the rocks off Devil's Point nearby to this island. Most of the passengers were rescued but among those lost were two females employed in the galley. They were of low social caste, so far as was known, without families, almost nameless—'

"The monster snarled, 'Spare me the history lesson. Are their remains buried here?'

"I assured him that they were, that I myself had dug the graves.

" 'Then on with it. I must have the bodies.'

"So, there under a moon which shed a light as pale and bloodless as the cadavers I disinterred, we robbed the two graves and carried the remains back to the monster's accursed refuge.

"Once there, he began working at fever heat, urged on by the faint rumblings of another storm fathering in the north. My work with the dead had had a steeling influence upon me. I was able to regard the bodies of those who have passed on with a certain callousness. But the manner in which this incredible fiend threw the corpses upon a table and poised over them with knife and saw filled me with revulsion. A brigade of devils could not have kept me in that charnel house another moment.

"I fled out into the night and rated myself as fortunate that the monster was too preoccupied with his

grisly work to follow. I took the boat and returned to my native haunts, keeping an eye wary at all times for sight of that hideous fiend bearing down upon me.

"Time passed. He did not come. I could only assume that he was through with me. But my uneasiness remained, and with no reason to stay among those who despise me—and whom I despise—here on this island, I have decided to leave these parts forever . . ."

There was no more. I sat there in my room as a guest of the good magistrate, David Tander, and reread the final page by the light of my guttering candle. I was in a quandary. First off, I was puzzled as to the authenticity of the document in my hand. The image of the repulsive little man who'd penned it came into my mind. Had he really experienced the dreadful confrontation, or had he slyly invented the whole thing in order to gull me out of a few miserable pounds?

I thought it significant that he had made no mention of the unfortunate Gregor or the beautiful maiden stolen from him by death. Was this significant? What I had before me was a wild yarn which needed verification in order to be seen as even a semblance of truth. Was there any way to obtain this verification?

I could demand that the graves of the two shipwrecked females be opened. That seemed logical. But suppose the tombs were found to be empty; would that prove Sam Lenz's story? Not entirely, I decided. The two bodies, if the graves *had* been violated, might well be in the dissecting rooms of some medical col-

lege. And if the farmer, whoever he was, did acknowledge the loss of a bull, he would no doubt hoot at the idea of its having been stolen by a towering fiend who killed it with a single blow of his fist.

That left only a search for the uninhabited island as feasible. But how feasible? Again, Lenz had given no clue as to its location. As I pondered my dilemma I saw again that sly, pinched, malevolent face. After a few moments I could think only one word.

Fraud.

Disgusting fraud.

My decision was then made. I would abandon this search. Max Gregor had been put away because of his mad hallucination concerning a monster. How soon, if I continued with my inquiry, would I be sent to keep him company?

There is something most satisfying in a final decision. It quiets the mind and puts one back onto normal pursuits. My pursuit was again of the footloose variety. I thanked David Tander for his courtesies and returned to England from whence I sojourned to southern France and took a house on the Mediterranean. It was a pleasant contrast—the sun, the company with new friends I met in that land of eternal gaiety.

But it palled and I returned finally to London and my flat on Gentry Mews.

Where a stunning surprise awaited me.

The Monster Lives!

The surprise came in the form of a letter from one Felix De Lacy. From the postmark I noted it as having been mailed there in London scarcely a week earlier. The missive was bulky, containing, in addition to Mr. De Lacy's note, several sheets of foolscap which appeared to be a brief manuscript but in the same handwriting. The letter read:

My Dear Lord Roger:

I come to you with what you will no doubt consider a strange request, and some even stranger information. It is my hope that we may meet personally but I choose to present first the enclosed data which I beg you to peruse carefully before making your decision. So kindly bear with me, good sir.

I shall be most direct. I resolved to contact you when, through investigations of my own, I dis-

covered that you have shown interest in what is purported to be an unspeakable monster afoot in the Orkney Islands. I, too, for reasons you will discover, am vitally interested in the truths or falsehoods involved. I too visited Queen's Hospital in Edinburgh to confront the unfortunate Max Gregor when I became aware of his existence. There, I met your friend, Dr. Leland Welch, who told me of your interest.

I too went northward and heard of you again in Larswall. My visit there was fruitless. I found nothing but disbelief and a desire among the natives to forget the terrible incidents which took place—including one of which I am sure you have not yet been informed.

Following in your footsteps, I returned to London to find that you had moved on to southern France. As I had pressing affairs of my own to handle, I turned to them and was so occupied for a time. Those obligations fulfilled, I discovered that you had left the French address and it is in the hope that you have returned to London that I write this letter.

While waiting, your lordship, I have put down some background details which I hope will prove of interest to you. I did this for two reasons. First, I want you to decide, without any personal pressure on my part, whether or not you wish to embark upon what might be a dangerous enterprise. Also, if you do decide in my favor, you will already possess vital knowledge of the situation and time will be saved.

I now await your decision. I can be reached at the Savoy Hotel and will come immediately upon your bidding.

Now I remain, your lordship, your obedient servant,

Felix De Lacy

P.S. As to the development of which you may not be aware—Max Gregor was released from Queen's Hospital while you were in France. He returned to Estray Island and his native Larswall, where a few days later he was found dead on a lonely shore, horribly slashed and mutilated as though by a savage beast.

F. D. L.

I had certainly been made aware of one thing—this De Lacy was a man with a flare for the dramatic as a means of furthering his ends. That terse postscript was meant to whet my curiosity if nothing else, and gain him the personal meeting for which he had pleaded. So it was with high interest that I went on to his foolscap, and into the incredible story he had to tell.

"When I was a youth my sister, my father, and I lived in a small forest cottage in France just below the German border directly south of the German town of Ingolstadt. Our circumstances were most meager due to our not inconsiderable fortune having been sequestered by the French government. Further details of our situation at the time are irrelevant. Suffice it to say that we were reconciled to our lot and had hopes of an improvement in our fortunes.

"We had been residing in the cottage for nearly two years when the terrible day I now refer to arrived. My sister and I had gone into the woods that morning where we remained, picking berries and digging roots, until late afternoon. We should not have tarried so long because there was an added responsibility we bore mutually. Our father was stone-blind, having been thus afflicted for years. Thus, we never left him alone for any great length of time.

"But we were not prepared for the stunning shock which confronted us when we entered the cottage upon our return. Our father was seated in his chair and at his feet crouched a monster so hideous as to defy description in the words of any language I have mastered; an inhuman thing, yet grotesquely human in that it was constructed of human parts—vast trunks of legs, arms which would have beggared those of a gorilla. Its face was enough to send sane people screaming toward whatever sanctuary: a huge death's head, yet imbued with some form of life.

"I am not a brave man, but seeing my father thus menaced, I flew at the creature with a poker I seized from the fireplace and belabored it with all my strength.

"Heaven must have been taking note at the time because the fiend could have torn me to bits in an instant. Instead, it emitted a horrible cry and fled.

"The time of this incident was brief. It could have been measured in seconds. But so deeply was it pressed into my mind that every detail is clearly remembered to this day.

"The revelation generated a search upon our part and we found to our amazement that the monster had

been living near us, perhaps for months, in an unused shed which had long been abandoned. We found there several books we had presumed lost and other artifacts proving he had not only been observing us over those months but had entered our cottage many times.

"The fact that he had escaped detection all that time must indicate to you a blindness afflicting my sister and me as well as our father. To us, however, it indicated a superhuman stealth upon the part of the monster.

"The horrible confrontation left us with many questions. Why had we not been harmed? What was the apparition's purpose in observing us for such a length of time? From whence had it come and in what direction had it fled?

"Our great difficulty—Agatha's and mine—was to convince our father of the truth. He said the creature had knocked civilly enough upon the door and begged entrance. When this was granted it deposed itself as a traveler hoping for food and shelter and at no time did it deport itself otherwise. His voice (father insisted upon designating the monster as male though he had no name for him) was deep, but resonant and cultured. While they were alone, he had shown no monstrous tendencies whatever. Quite the opposite. His approach had engendered nothing other than deep sympathy upon my father's part—to an extent that a great sense of guilt arose in my father, a man of most gentle nature. He brooded as time went on. Our fortunes did improve later. We left the forest cottage and went back to our rightful place in society, but the spectre of that awful day remained with my father there in the dark cell of his blindness.

"Years passed. My sister married and departed with her husband to Australia, thus going out of our lives. My father became enfeebled and I thought he had forgotten the time of horror in the forest cottage.

"Then I went through the sad but inevitable experience of his death, and when his will was read I discovered how deeply the experience had merged into his being. The will was so worded that it placed upon me a solemn obligation to watch always for the Lonely Wayfarer, as my father called him, to make reparation if humanly possible for the great wrong we had done in driving him from our door.

"I could only decide that deep in his heart my father had never believed what Agatha and I had told him; that the Lonely Wayfarer was other than a worthy, mortal man in need of help.

"Which brings me to the present, or rather, the near past. With nothing having been heard again of the monster, I had long assumed him dead or gone forever out of my life. But through research I undertook some years ago, and recent developments, some new aspects have opened to me.

"There is much more which I will not burden you with at this writing. And I grant that the whole present situation is indeed tenuous. All logic states that there is no connection between the recent tragedies in the Orkneys and my experience long ago in northern France. But my feelings in the matter go beyond logic. Deep in my soul a dire voice keeps repeating and repeating—

"*The Monster still lives!*"

The Curse of Frankenstein

Felix De Lacy said, "You now understand, from the data I have given you, why I must continue with my mad quest. But so that we may understand each other perfectly, tell me your own motive."

I had met Felix De Lacy in the bar room of his hotel and found him to be a man somewhat past middle age, slim, quite intense, but withal, an engaging person. His question, however, seemed a little peremptory in the light of his plea that I interest myself in his project. Still, I could see the wisdom of an understanding from the very start, so I explained as best I could.

"Call it curiosity if you will—an inquiring nature. It began casually enough, motivated by compassion for the unfortunate Max Gregor. But there was more to it than that. Perhaps a yearning for adventure and thus an escape from boredom."

"Most frankly put. I am deeply in debt to your

lordship for your interest and I am sure that I can promise you exciting adventure. But what is more—definite peril."

"That does not change my intent. But please—my title has always been a source of embarrassment to me. I do not like the servile deference it engenders in many quarters. Therefore, I present myself whenever possible as plain Mr. Henry Roger."

"I shall respect that wish."

"Thank you. And now, if you will be so kind, tell me that which your letter did not reveal—how you can possibly associate your youthful experience in France with Max Gregor's tragedy in the Orkneys."

"In order to do that, I will sketch, as briefly as possible, the results of my research and investigations up to this point. They came at various times and under various circumstances. But what I uncovered is so incredible I can only state it, not defend it as truth, though truth I know it to be.

"Shortly before our forest cottage experience, a man named Victor Frankenstein—a madman no doubt, but possessed of genius—did in fact create a living monster from sectioned cadavers stolen from graves. He performed this fiendish miracle in a laboratory in Ingolstadt, Germany. When he looked upon his work, he was horrified. Whether he drove his insane creation from his sight or whether the creature fled of his own volition is not important. But beyond doubt it was the same creature who found our cottage and spent those months observing us.

"Victor Frankenstein was not clear of him, however. The monster faced him again and, in his loneli-

ness, demanded that Frankenstein create for him a mate—a female of his own horrible species. I think Frankenstein must have agreed because, some time later, he set up another laboratory on a deserted island in the Orkneys. However, he was unable to repeat his hideous miracle, or refused to complete it, because no female counterpart of the monster ever existed, I am sure.

"Evidently enraged by this, the fiend virtually destroyed Frankenstein by murdering those he loved."

I raised a hand to intervene. "If there is any truth to that, it certainly does not square with the gentle creature with which your grandfather became obsessed."

"Quite true," De Lacy agreed. "This is one of the inconsistencies my investigations have not reconciled. And I must admit that there are other gaps I have not been able to fill. Much of my information came from letters written by one Robert Walton, an Englishman, to his sister Margaret. Walton, amply financed, had an urge for the sea, and the letters were dispatched from his ship. He was engaged in Arctic exploration, and they told of an emaciated, half-dead Victor Frankenstein Walton rescued from an ice pack. Frankenstein had been pursuing a monster of indescribable hideousness, intent upon the creature's final destruction.

"Then, according to the missives, the monster too came aboard the ship. There was a confrontation between the two after which Frankenstein died. Thereupon, the creature he had created, evidently now intent upon self-destruction, vanished into the Polar wastes where survival was palpably impossible."

"A fantastic tale!" I exclaimed.

"But again, the frustrating gaps. I never discovered what transpired immediately after the murder of Frankenstein's loved ones. I assume that Frankenstein made vengeance his life's work and pursued the fiend from that time on, to come finally to Walton's ship. I am sure the entire story was told in the letters but many were destroyed or unattainable."

"But what you did find put the monster in the Arctic where he could not have survived. So that had to be the end of it."

"Perhaps, perhaps not. I see the recent events in the Orkneys as beyond all possibility of coincidence. And then again how do we know—?"

"The time span, man! The gap of years between your cottage experience and the present."

"What do we know about the mortality of a being created from cadavers? For that matter, I have no proof that Frankenstein did not create a female monster. Perhaps they mated. Perhaps their offspring is only now reaching maturity."

"Those are far-out suppositions."

"I realize that, but are they any more fantastic than that which we now know to be fact?"

"I suppose not—"

"Personally, I do not believe there was a mate. I stick to the declaration made in my letter. The monster still lives."

"None of what you have said even remotely touched upon Gregor's story of seeing his beloved risen from her grave."

"As I stated," De Lacy replied, "I do not function

as a defender. I merely give you what I have. And there is one more thing. My conversation with Gregor at Queen's Hospital. I think it was more revealing than yours. Gregor described the monster to me in greater detail. And I tell you. It was identical to our forest apparition."

I saw no point in further discussion. Nor, I am sure, did De Lacy. At any rate, his eyes lit up in joy and gratitude when I said, "It seems to me we should lay this ghost once and for all by returning to Larswall and making certain decisive moves. I am sure the good David Tander will welcome us."

"That is what I have prayed that you would say," De Lacy countered fervently. "I would like nothing better than to terminate the curse of Victor Frankenstein once and for all by whatever means. It is just that, in all honesty, I do not feel up to it alone. I have been most desperately in need of help."

The words engendered in me an admiration for the man. He was charged with fear. Yet an inner courage demanded that he carry on to whatever end fate had in store.

"Separately, we could be destroyed," I said, "but together we may win through."

And thus our pact was made. . . .

I found Felix De Lacy to be a pleasant traveling companion. In view of his compulsive interest in the tracking down of a fiend, I'd expected a somewhat morbid nature about him. This was not the case. Once we were embarked on our journey he made no mention of our mutual objective. He had a cheerful, brisk

personality and he was an excellent conversationalist. As we traveled, he regaled me with most interesting accounts of Australia, where he had visited his sister and her husband. I had never been to the subcontinent, and resolved to make the trip if God spared me and my health remained excellent.

As we had presumed, David Tander welcomed us when we arrived in Larswall. Always the gentleman, he bridled his surprise while I could clearly see that he yearned to ask the direct question: *What are you good sirs doing back here on our island?*

Both Felix and I felt that guile should not be the order of things, so that evening, over glasses of port, I came straight to the point.

"Mr. Tander, we are most interested in the tragic death of poor Max Gregor."

He shook his head sadly. "Is your visit in any way official?"

"No. Not in the least. Except that if we find criminal acts have been perpetrated, we would feel obliged to contact the authorities."

This was an ill-advised statement and I quickly regretted it. Tander reddened slightly as he said, "Mr. Roger, I hope you have not gotten the impression that we are overtly lawless here on Eastray Island. The manner of Max's death certainly creates a suspicion of foul play."

"A *suspicion!*" Felix burst forth. "I should certainly think so. We understand the man was literally torn to pieces!"

I felt sorry for Tander, he was so obviously distressed. "I cannot deny that. His flesh was rent by

deep gashes as though he'd been attacked by a great cat. His throat was slashed and he was almost bloodless when he was found. The indication was that he had lived for some time during the struggle and made a great effort to defend himself. Had he died quickly, the bleeding would have been less profuse."

"To what conclusion did that lead?" Felix asked.

"That he was attacked by a vicious animal of some sort."

"You have such animals on this island?"

"No, my good sir. But neither do we have any humans who would be capable of such a hideous deed. It is not as though we were in London or some vast city where degenerates may lurk behind every corner. We have a small population and I know our people."

"What about the monster which Max Gregor saw originally?"

"An hallucination!" Tander cried sharply. "It could have been nothing else. If such a beast existed here in our midst, it would have been seen by others!"

"He said it came from the sea."

"I'll grant you some possibility of that being the case. Who really knows what creatures are out there? I do not admit it as probably—only as possible, because proof to the contrary cannot be presented. However, in my own mind, I am convinced that the monster was a figment of Max's fevered imagination."

"But man, you said there was no proof."

"True. It is just that I cannot accept Max's experience as being half myth and half truth. We know of course that the sight of his dead beloved was pure mental vision. To couple that with a true

flesh-and-blood fiend in the same experience is too much."

I could see that Felix intended to press on, to acquaint Tander with the evidence he had gathered over so many weary months and years. My instincts rose against this and I signaled Felix to veer away. In the first place, Tander was our host, and we were close to treating him like a prisoner in dock.

Also, and possibly more important, it was obvious that he and the people of Larswall had no answers and expected none. They wanted the terrible incident forgotten, to dissolve eventually into myth and legend.

So I lifted my glass to Tander and said, "Your port is as fine as your hospitality, sir. And now, with your leave, I shall retire. The trip was most tiring. Are you ready, Felix?"

He obviously was not but he acquiesced gracefully and we went to our chamber, where I spoke immediately to Felix.

"There was no point in questioning Tander further," I said. "You ran the risk of antagonizing him, after we had already learned something of vital importance."

"And that was—?"

"The attitude of the people on this island. Tander reflected it. They want no one prying about into the tragedies they have experienced. Therefore, anything we do must be done as secretly as possible. We will get no help, and if we persist in open inquiry they will no doubt throw obstacles in our path."

This depressed Felix even as he accepted it as truth. "All of which leaves us against a wall."

"Not entirely." I regarded him narrowly as I went on. "Two able-bodied men could most certainly open a grave without help, could they not?"

"Why, yes—of course—"

His expression was telling: a look of revulsion mixed with regret. It was not difficult to see that he was coming, for the first time, to physical grips with a problem which had been so long academic. There was a vast difference between searching through musty documents and facing up to the reality of physical contact.

Making no note of his discomfort, I went on. "A spade and a dark lantern should solve once and for all the mystery of Max Gregor's confrontation on the beach. Fantasy or reality? We can soon know."

"But suppose we find—"

"I have a suggestion, Felix."

"I would welcome it."

"I suggest we gear our future activities to what we find."

"I do not understand."

"If we find Lenia's coffin empty, we should certainly proceed further. If, on the other hand, the star-crossed lass still rests in her grave, I suggest we terminate our search. It will prove Max Gregor's hallucination, and on the strength of that, I think we should assume that Sam Lenz invented his horrible yarn in order to gain a few pounds."

"But if we do proceed," Felix said uncertainly, "what steps would we take?"

"Then we would have only one possible course—to search for the island where Lenz served the monster."

"I agree," Felix replied, and it was not difficult to see that he preferred the first alternative—that we find the girl resting peacefully in her grave. . . .

So we went forth the following morning, two gentlemen of leisure, bent upon pleasantly visiting the points of interest Eastray afforded, these points certainly including the weather-beaten old church, the small, stone manse, and the ancient graveyard of Larswall.

The whole religious establishment was located westward of the village in a flat area guarded on three sides by rocky ridges. The buildings had been erected for permanence rather than beauty; a square stone edifice, its steeple jutting up turretlike with a small cross at the top to identify it for what it was. The manse huddled by its side. We knocked upon the ancient door but got no response, so we assumed that the good vicar was off on his ministerial duties.

This left us free to examine the cemetery and we discovered that it lay roughly in two sections: a part close to the church, which was reasonably well cared for by the relatives of those who had gone beyond, and a part further out into which lesser personages had evidently been placed. The nearer section boasted permanent markers, some of them quite elaborate, while in the other part the graves were marked by wooden crosses only, many of them having rotted away.

It was there, I assumed, that unknown and poorly regarded souls were laid to rest, perhaps bodies washed up from the sea. It would certainly have been

from this section that the two female bodies referred to by Lenz would have been purloined.

My mention of this brought Felix to a halt. "It just occurred to me—" he mused.

"Tell me."

"You once said that if we found the graves of those two unfortunate women empty, that it would prove nothing, that the graves could have been robbed for the benefit of some medical school."

"True."

"Then could not the same thing hold for the body of Lenia Amunsen?"

"I think not. Grave robbers specialize in the remains of unimportant people. They tend to avoid the graves of those who leave loved ones behind."

"I am sure you are right."

"Another thing, my dear Felix, we would not be able to find the graves of those two women without inquiries we certainly do not wish to make. While there," I went on, pointing my cane, "is the resting place of Max Gregor's beloved."

The grave had been placed in a grassy nook, guarded above by two steadfast northern pines. A granite marker stood at the head while a plaster urn, bearing now-wilted flowers, faced the foot.

All in all, I viewed the grave with satisfaction because it was so situated as to be not visible from the manse.

"We will have to be very careful," I said. "The sod must be cut away in blocks so that we may replace it exactly as it was."

Felix looked at the sky and shivered. The day had

been fair but now clouds were rising in the north and a wind was stirring. As we turned from the grave, the clouds scudded across the sun, casting a pall over the cemetery and over our spirits.

"What a grim place!" Felix murmured. "Let us return to David Tander's fireside and a hot cup of tea."

"I gather that you would not care to winter in the Orkneys."

"Or summer here either, for that matter."

"Still, there is a grandeur about these islands. And one can hardly ignore the strength of spirit in those who make their homes here."

"But how they struggle for an existence!"

"Wherever habitation is possible on this earth you will find mankind struggling to live. Even in the polar climates to the north—there among the ice floes around the Pole itself—men and women are fighting to win a livelihood."

"It is something to contemplate," Felix replied.

I am sure, however, his thoughts were on the grim task we planned when darkness came. . . .

There were certain risks which were unavoidable. These, we took into consideration and hoped for the best. The greatest of these was avoiding the good David Tander. He was the most cordial of hosts but he would hardly have seen the witching hour as a time to stroll about on the island. Fortunately, he was a bachelor, thus giving us only two souls to worry about—Tander himself, and his housekeeper. The latter had quarters in the attic of his establishment and Tander himself, we discovered when we crept from

the house, slept the deep sleep of one whose conscience was clear.

We commandeered a spade and a prying bar from his rear toolshed and set off into the night just at the hour of twelve, equipped also with a dark lantern which threw a candle beam sufficient to guide us.

The threatened storm had not arrived, but a cold night wind swept the island and moaned fitfully through the graveyard as though whispering news of the upper world to the listening dead.

I went to work quickly while Felix held the lantern. The sod over the grave was firm, which made for easy removal in blocks. With the surface cut away, I dug swiftly and was gratified to find that what with the rocky land, the grave was not the prescribed six feet in depth. Half that distance brought my spade to where a hollow ring signaled our goal.

The lid of the coffin was cleared quickly and I carefully pried it loose. The moment had come. Felix lowered the dark lantern into the grave and I prepared to lift the lid.

My own tension surprised me. I am a practical person and see death as death, a state as logical as life. But the thought of looking upon the pallid face of a maiden in her grave under such circumstances as these put queasy touches into my stomach.

Still, I was more fortunate than my companion. Felix's hand, as he held the lantern, trembled lamentably.

We stared into the coffin, then lifted our eyes and stared at each other. No shrouded body. No pallid face. The coffin was empty.

Nothing was said. After a few moments Felix withdrew the lantern and within a half hour's span the grave was almost as we had found it, the earth returned, the sod blocks back in place.

Nor did words pass between us on the way to Tander's house. It was only when we were back in our chamber that I said, "You are terribly disappointed, aren't you Felix?"

He gave me a quick glance, then his eyes fell away. "Why do you say that?"

"Because of my own reaction. We are both appalled by what we found because of its effect upon our own destinies. We were most firm in declaring an end to this adventure if we found Lenia Amunsen still in her grave. And we both fully expected to so find her. Had there been any doubt in our minds, we would not have been so glib in declaring our future course."

"You mean resolving to go on if the body were *not* there?"

"Exactly."

"So—?"

I threw the question back at him. "So—?"

"So unless we proceed as planned, we show ourselves as weaklings."

"You put it clearly."

"Then I would say that we have no choice but to go on."

"I agree."

"So be it."

"As it is, we could still fail. Finding that secluded island will be far more difficult than finding a grave in a cemetery."

Felix frowned. "My dear Henry. There is no need to patronize me—to treat me as a frightened child."

"But that was not my intention."

"Indeed it was. You were holding out failure as a goal to be desired—just as the girl's body in her grave was our acknowledged hope. With the die now cast, I shall go on as resolutely as you yourself."

By way of apology, I smiled ruefully. "You misjudge me to my benefit, Felix. Resolute is hardly the word. If there is one frightened child in this room, there are certainly two."

"I'm sorry, Henry. Nerves—"

"And why not? I suggest we retire and face the morning fresh and rested. . . ."

But sleep was difficult for me to find. I lay in bed staring at the ceiling, one truth now etched sharply in my mind: the monster still lived!

The Finger of Fire

The following morning I greeted Tander in his garden, where he was tending his flowers, and informed him that Felix and I planned a cruise among the northern islands.

His reply was a worried glance at the heavens. "Our weather is most uncertain in this latitude," he said. "I would hardly recommend an extended trip."

"I am fairly well skilled in the handling of sail," I informed him.

"Even granting that, there is peril. I implore you not to venture too far. Most of the men are off with the fishing fleet at this time so a rescue boat would be difficult."

My reply, that we would not stray too far into unknown waters, was not entirely truthful, but it satisfied him. Also, I was gratified that he did not inquire deeply into our reasons for the cruise. Even casual falsehood can be distasteful.

Thus it came about that upon the following morning, Felix and I set the sail of a small skiff and, with dawn breaking, tacked northward over the course we hoped had been taken by Sam Lenz and his captor that stormy night months earlier.

By this time all our irresolutions had vanished. Whether faced by success or failure, we would put forth our best efforts and stand upon the judgment of fate.

Felix had no sailing skills but neither was he a landlubber, having spent much time upon the water. Fortunately, neither of us were susceptible to *mal de mer* as there were enough discomforts without upheavals of the stomach. We were dressed for the weather but the cold bite of the North Sea wind was most uncomfortable.

We held as close to due north as possible. Distancewise, we of course had little to go on. In his narrative, Sam Lenz had been vague on that point, stating only that the monster's powerful stroke had sent their boat driving swiftly into the teeth of the wind. I longed to know just how swiftly. I tried to estimate the distance of our goal from Larswall on the basis of the other trips he mentioned. When they came back to Larswall to poach the bull from a local pasture the trip covered some part of a single night; most of it, I assumed, because the many islands we passed could be seen as totally barren from the skiff.

Finally, well into the evening, we came to a larger one which held promise. We could see no sign of habitation, but there were hills and ridges obstructing the view.

"There might well be a hidden cottage or two on that benighted pile of rock," Felix observed.

"I agree. Perhaps we had better put into that cove for the night and explore in morning light."

Felix was as stiff and sore as I, and readily agreed. "We'd better put in, regardless," he said. "Those are certainly storm clouds bearing down from the northwest."

We quickly moored the skiff and erected the tent we had brought along. And because the approaching storm did not appear to be a small one, we moved our supplies from the boat to the tent and prepared to wait it out. We were able to prepare our meal and clear away before the first lashings of icy rain drove us inside. The wind increased in velocity and was soon tearing at our tent stakes while we huddled in our shelter and prayed the ropes would hold.

The howling of the gale, like thousands of lost souls pleading with heaven, was of a nature to preclude sleep. Yet so great was his exhaustion that Felix dropped off in a matter of minutes.

Fear of disaster to our tent and supplies kept me awake longer, but finally I too dozed off. My sleep was not as deep as his, however, because I was awakened by the cessation of the screaming wind. When I opened my eyes, the comparative silence was deafening. Only a gentle rain fell upon our canvas.

I went outside to find that while the heart of the storm had passed, the heavens were still plagued by great, black cloudbanks.

These were revealed to me by brilliant flashes of lightning which split the skies again and again. I

watched, fascinated and awed by the display of nature's might. There were perhaps a dozen of these flashing bolts before the celestial fury was spent.

After a time I returned to my sleeping pad and, despite a new excitement which stirred me, managed to go quickly to sleep.

The excitement remained with me when I awoke. We breakfasted, after which we packed our gear and Felix said, "We may as well look beyond those ridges before reloading the boat."

"I think we would be wasting our time," was my reply. "I suggest we return to the skiff and push north by northwest. It may be to our advantage."

He glanced at me questioningly, but made no objection. Felix, as I had discovered, was not at his best during the early hours. Being more of a night person than otherwise, his resistance as well as his curiosity was low upon awakening.

We returned to the sea and sailed for some three hours in the direction I had indicated. We passed several islands and so long as I evinced no interest in them, neither did Felix.

Then we came finally to a larger jut of rocky land and when I selected a small cove for mooring, Felix raised his eyebrows and asked, "Why here?"

"I think it is perhaps the island we are looking for."

He remained mystified while we secured the skiff and climbed to the top of a nearby peak. I studied the jagged horizon and finally pointed in a westerly direction. "Just there, I think."

A twenty-minute walk proved my prediction to be

accurate. We topped a rise and were looking down at a sprawling cottage on a level area just below.

Felix stared in amazement. "By all that is holy! How did you know?"

I must confess that I enjoyed my triumph and his obvious admiration. "It was surprisingly simple," I explained. "Last night I left our tent to watch the storm and I was intrigued by the fact that the lightning bolts struck several times in approximately the same place —here to the northwest. Then I recalled something that Sam Lenz wrote—that a rod erected over the monster's hidden laboratory appeared to draw bolts from the sky. So we sailed in this direction and from the hillock, where we moored, I could just see the tip of the rod he described."

"And you call that simple, my dear Henry? You are too modest. I call it superb reasoning."

Before I could reply, our childish mood of excitement fell away. We stood there in silence for several long moments, before Felix said, "If the monster is there, he has no doubt seen us."

The realization that we had come finally to grips with the fiend, who murdered and destroyed without conscience, brought the chilling reaction. We stood there for some time, studying the abode for signs of life. There were none. It had evidently been the home of a farmer at some distant time; an optimistic fellow who had tried to farm the few acres of sour earth surrounding the house.

"If the monster is there," I said finally, "we should certainly have seen some evidence by now."

"Perhaps he is away."

"Or sleeping?"

Felix straightened his shoulders. "Whatever the situation, we did not come this far to turn back."

Then, with the courage I had grown to admire in him, he marched boldly down the slope. I hastened to catch him and we approached the cottage side by side.

Still there was no sign of life. We found the door slightly ajar, and I pushed it slowly, with visions of a hideous form suddenly charging out. Only silence greeted us. I entered first, into a large, low-ceilinged room and, oddly, the first thing to catch by eye was the pile of rags upon which Sam Lenz had lain while observing the actions of his captor.

Things were as he had described them. The table at which the monster had sat at his studies was in the middle of the room. On the left was the fireplace with the spit upon which their meat had been roasted. The entire far half of the room was given over to the strange laboratory devices.

Our worst moment was when Felix saw the monster's dissection table. It was hardly a pleasant instant for me either. I recalled sharply, the words of Sam Lenz:

. . . *the manner in which this incredible fiend threw the corpses on the table and poised over them with a knife.* . . .

The work of that knife was now apparent, the sectioned bodies thrown callously in one corner.

"I can't stand this!" Felix cried, and fled from the cottage.

I shrink from calling the fact that I remained a

mark of greater callousness on my part; I prefer to say that I maintained a stronger grip upon my emotions than Felix. At any rate, I did remain, throwing a blanket from Sam's bedpile over the charnel heap.

I then began examining the fantastic laboratory equipment which had been assembled in this remote place, and stood in awe of the energy and ingenuity it proved. The genius of Victor Frankenstein? Undoubtedly.

The control board—I assumed it was that—contained no less than twenty dial indicators. There were half-a-dozen vats and containers of various sizes—some of metal, some of glass—each connected to others by metal tubes.

There was a table quite apart from the one used for dissecting. This second one was mounted upon a hinged post and equipped with straps and buckles. In contrast it was meticulously clean, as though Victor Frankenstein, at least in this area, had subscribed to the theories of Pasteur and Lister relative to antisepsis and bacterial contamination.

The table at which the monster had worked while Lenz observed him yielded a great amount of data penciled upon foolscap and scraps of paper. There was no order to it, thrown casually about as it was, but this made no difference to me. I would not have understood it even if it had been neatly catalogued.

Then, just as I was about to follow Felix out into cleaner air, my eye fell upon a prize indeed. I do not know how I overlooked it for so long, placed there as it was in full view—propped against the control board on the narrow shelf at its base.

The green book to which Lenz had referred.

I picked it up and leafed through it, not even then realizing its value. I saw only that it was narrative rather than data, and written in a legible hand.

Unable to bear the sight of the place any longer, I thrust the book into my pocket and hurried outside to find Felix seated upon a stone up the slope. He was pale but now more composed.

"I am sorry to have deserted you, my dear Henry," he said, "but remaining in that room would have made me even more of a problem to you."

"Please do not apologize. The main point at the moment is whether or not we are alone here."

Felix shuddered. "We were not set upon by the fiend, but I still feel hidden eyes boring into me."

"A natural feeling. However, I am sure that he is either gone for good or off on some personal mission."

"In the latter case, we had better plan as to how we will receive him when he returns."

"I suggest that we do not remain here as a welcoming committee. Let us return to our boat and find another island upon which to spend the night. Then we will sail back to Larswall and bring our findings to the attention of the authorities."

"Agreed," Felix replied. "In fact, I would agree to any plan which would get me away from this accursed place. . . ."

An hour's sailing brought us to a neighboring island which seemed acceptable as a night stand. We moored and found a place for our tent which was buttressed

on three sides by rocky cliffs, the fourth side facing the sea.

We pitched our tent and when I mentioned food, Felix gestured a denial of any such need. "A hot cup of tea, Henry, but nothing more. I fear I shall have lost some weight before my stomach will take food again."

I did not press him, knowing full well how he felt. We had our tea which I accompanied by a cold biscuit, my own appetite not at all ravenous. Then Felix went quickly to sleep, but with my own mind still upon that momentous day's activities, I was far from sleep. I made myself comfortable, brought the lantern close, and opened the green book.

It was only a matter of moments before I realized what an incredible find it was. I skimmed through it quickly, my excitement rising. It had been set down by the hand of the monster himself! Again, I recalled Lenz's account:

. . . *then, usually after a period of desperate tension . . . he would turn to the other and write swiftly onto the pages of a green-bound journal.* . . .

I began to read. The time passed. And the whole, terrible world of Frankenstein's fiend opened to me. . . .

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mold me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?

—Milton
Paradise Lost

BOOK TWO:

THE QUARRY

The Monster's Chronicle

"My intent in setting down these words is simple. I have been called fiend and monster. Men have turned from me as from a stench out of Hell. In all places I am looked upon with horror and pursued in fury because men fear what they cannot understand. But there are human yearnings within this hideous framework with which I was endowed: a yearning for justice; a balancing of the scales; a cry from my heart for men to know that my creator, Victor Frankenstein, was a greater fiend than I.

"Therefore, I write:

"I was conceived in a mind, not a womb. I began not as human seed, but as a rash and arrogant idea of a man who put himself as high as God.

"Victor Frankenstein.

"This man, consumed by an evil dream, scavenged through graveyards, opened tombs, thieved the bodies of the dead, and stole from them the various parts

which went to make up the hideous figure men see when I walk the earth. This sacrilege having been committed, he charged life into his creation and I was born. My first memory is the sight of his face when he looked upon me as a living thing. His expression of disgust, loathing, horror. A look of such revulsion that I ran terror-stricken into the night, a monstrosity with the mind and consciousness of an infant, alone in a dark world. My survival during those first hours and days was made possible by the very horror I engendered in men's eyes. They fled me in fear of their lives. Then, with the cowardice so prevalent in humans, they refused to believe what they had seen, preferring to call their senses traitors rather than face further danger.

"Equipped with a full-grown body, I did not die from exposure. I learned of light and dark and heat and cold by experiencing them alone in a great forest where I had gone for sanctuary. Hunger taught me the need of food and instinct showed me means of procuring it. I fashioned garments against the weather, seeking neither help nor advice because early experience told me it would not be forthcoming.

"It was thus that I came finally upon a small cottage in the forest and remained unseen while I watched. I saw a very old man and two children. They seemed peaceful and gentle. Still, I would not risk showing myself even while I was greatly attracted to them.

"Therefore, I took up abode in a nearby shed once used by animals but now deserted and never visited by

any of the three. There, I lived and watched and learned of the world into which the true monster, Victor Frankenstein, had hurled me.

"The children, a boy and a girl, came and went. At times they took the old man with them, carefully and gently, and I learned in due time that he was their father and that he was blind.

"This proved of great advantage to me. With the cunning of an animal, I entered their cottage even while he sat alone by their fire. A thirst for knowledge was ever with me, and I laboriously taught myself to read from the children's primer books I borrowed off their cottage shelves.

"Later, I returned these books and took others, from which I learned of history and progress and turmoil and the many follies of man. I learned also from listening to the conversations of the three when I crept close to the cottage in the night.

"Until, finally, my yearning for companionship overcame my judgment and I knocked on the cottage door one day when the children were off in the woods.

"The old man bade me enter and I presented myself as a traveler seeking food and shelter. His gentle nature responded and he made me welcome, and we were conversing when the children returned.

"During my long solitude I had almost forgotten the hideous appearance I presented. Thus, I was momentarily surprised at the looks of horror on their faces when they saw me. The boy could only believe I was intent upon murder and destruction. He bravely

attacked me. I reacted only with sorrow and despair and sobbed as I fled the cottage, never to see again this family to whom I owed so much.

"But crouching alone in the forest, I was a far different person than the one who had entered it so many months earlier. There was within me now a terror at being alone. The need for companionship was overpowering. It drove me to seek out my creator, Victor Frankenstein. I accomplished this by traveling backward as I had come, to the German town of Ingolstadt where I had been created. Sharpened animal cunning stood me in good stead. Deviousness was my main weapon, and I won through—to discover that Victor Frankenstein had left Ingolstadt. I followed, staying on his trail, to finally meet him face to face in the wild Valley of the Chamonix in southeastern France where he had gone, a troubled man, to seek solace from nature. It was a desolate place, a great rocky gorge walled in by forest green, dotted here and there by the gray of ruined and abandoned castles.

"We met there on a glacier with the savage river tumbling below us and I made my plea.

" 'Create for me a mate of my own kind; as ugly as I. As leperously avoided by your kind. If you would but do this for me, I would be complete and I would freely forgive you the wrong you did by bringing me into being.'

"The argument was long and heated, but I finally won his agreement. He would create a female for me in an honest effort to partly right the terrible wrong he had done.

"Overjoyed by his agreement, I willingly gave him all the time he would need, promising not to grow impatient if he encountered difficulties. On that note, we parted.

"He did encounter difficulties but they were of an emotional nature, a struggle with his revulsions and his conscience. He was unable to remain in one place, moving always, traveling restlessly about the continent.

"I was never far from him. Always invisible, always in the background, watching, patiently waiting. And it was during this time that I experienced a tragedy of my own. While following Victor Frankenstein, I chanced to seek shelter in a horse shed. There was a small child playing there and at sight of me the boy screamed in terror. I seized him but with no thought of murder. I wanted only to reassure and silence him. This was impossible, and as a result, the child's breath was cut off and he died.

"I was as shocked as I am sure any human would have been. Seeing nothing that I could do, not being able to recreate life as could Frankenstein, I fled the place and continued to follow my creator.

"I learned later that a girl, a servant of the Frankenstein family, had been tried and convicted of the death and was hanged for it. This shocked me deeply. Had I been there at the time, I am sure I would have intervened, even at my own peril. At least that was what I told myself in the bitterness of my self-condemnation and I sincerely hope it was true.

"Meanwhile, I followed Victor Frankenstein. He

was joined by a friend, one Henry Clerval, and his travels continued until he came finally to the bleak and windswept Orkney Islands north of Scotland.

"There, it seemed, my long vigil would end because Victor Frankenstein found a house on a deserted island and set up a laboratory. I was overjoyed! Now my long, lonely years would end in a companionship which would bring me peace and contentment.

"But not so. With full half the preliminary work done, the perfidious Frankenstein broke his promise. Seeing that this was true, I confronted him and he confessed it. He could not bring himself to create a female counterpart of his first great sin against God and nature.

"I pleaded and threatened but to no avail. Why I did not kill him on the spot I will never know; probably because, even though he remained resolute in his refusal, I would not give up hope.

"At any rate, I fled in anguish but remained upon his perimeter. Now the goodness, the kindness, the humanity I had learned from my months by the forest cottage vanished. Twice betrayed—once by my very creation and a second time by Victor Frankenstein's cowardly betrayal, the demonic in me arose.

"I came upon Frankenstein's friend, Clerval, and slew him as casually as Frankenstein himself would have stepped upon a bug. I heard of Frankenstein's coming marriage, whereupon I confronted him again and promised to be with him on his wedding night. I kept that promise, killing his bride in vengeance for having been deprived of my own, and presented him with her dead body.

"That left only Frankenstein himself to be dealt with. But I did not confront him murderously. After slaying his bride, a great sense of futility settled over me. The satisfaction I had expected was not the prize I won. Futility instead, when I discovered that there is no satisfaction in vengeance. Rather, it deepened and broadened my pit of black despair.

"I wanted only to escape from the realms of humankind with their hatreds and cruelties and vices. So I turned from Frankenstein and all the horror he represented and traveled north toward the place where ice and snow and desolation reigned supreme.

"But I had stirred Frankenstein to madness by my acts. He now lived for one thing—to slay me as cruelly as I had slain those he loved. He followed me with a determination that was maniacal, ignoring all hardships.

"We met for the last time on an ice-bound ship in the Arctic; a ship belonging to an Englishman named Robert Walton. Frankenstein had come to the ship before me, the rigors of sleet and cold having taken its toll. He was dying, and he cursed me with his last breath.

"With his passing, all urge for life departed my mind; all emotion was drained from me save a yearning for my own death, and I returned to my boat and rowed northward among the floes and bergs toward the top of the earth.

"I came finally to a silent, frozen world where no life existed, and then by the grace of God—or so I thought—there was a great upheaval around me.

Towering ice cliffs collapsed, burying me deep in solid ice.

"I welcomed its cold embrace as from the only true lover I had ever known. . . ."

The monster's journal did not end there, but I could not go on. The candle in my dark lantern sputtered out. My natural curiosity was most offended, but my aching head and tortured eyes welcomed this. I favored them and did not light another candle, joining Felix in a troubled sleep.

Then, the following morning, there was something more important to occupy my mind: Felix's condition. The physical and mental strain of our journey into horror had taken its toll. Felix was ashen, shaking from attacks of fever followed by wracking chills. It therefore behooved me to get him quickly into more favorable surroundings.

This I did, and we found our host, the good Tander, cordial and sympathetic as ever. We put Felix to bed, where Tander's housekeeper tended him. She was most efficient, leaving me no duty other than to look in upon him occasionally. Still, I did not risk returning to the monster's journal during daylight hours for fear that Tander would come upon me and make inquiries I did not care to answer.

Therefore, it was three days later, with Felix asleep and the house deathly quiet, that I lit a candle and again opened the green journal. The storm which awaited us upon our return to the village had abated somewhat, reducing itself to a futile wind that howled

dismally over the eaves and tested the shutters with cold fingers. As it moaned and whispered to me in dismal measures, I read on.

"My sojourn in that icy coffin was timeless. It could have been hours or days or months. In truth, it was years, that incredible span during which I experienced what I thought was death.

"Not so. The boon of oblivion was not to be mine. The condition into which I had come merely transferred me to another world. Never, during all that time, did I lose consciousness. The body Frankenstein constructed for me had already experienced true death and in that process somehow had acquired a resistance to the lifeless state. Recharged now with life, it retreated into frigid hibernation as does the great Russian bear when the elements drive him to cover.

"The level of consciousness where my mind was sent to dwell was neither joyous nor sorrowful; neither warm nor frigid; neither hopeful nor charged with despair. It was a prison of vast freedom, where all such contradictions merged into a logical whole. I was a part of that whole, without desire or appetite, ever sustained by an infinite power which was both serene and tempestuous.

"It was given me to know many things. I was all and I was nothing. I was the ocean into which a drop of water fell and I was also the drop of water falling.

"It was a place to dwell in total fulfillment for all eternity, but the cycles of earth decreed otherwise. The ice pack in which I had been trapped edged ever

southward. It fell into the grip of warmer climes and split apart and I was suddenly reborn in a great crashing travail of thundering ice and mighty waters.

"This was a rebirth of vast proportions because I came forth with a body even more hideous perhaps, but one triumphant over death; with a mind supremely honed and keened and broadened beyond all human capability.

"My exhilaration from sheer living was immense. The sense of power derived from my rebirth sent my spirits soaring. Impervious now to all perils nature visits upon human flesh, the vastness of the sea daunted me not, nor did any other barrier between myself and my desires.

"And desires, there were. The need for human satisfactions had increased within me; but now, with the means to satisfy them. My need for the companionship of a mate became a prime compulsion.

"So I returned to the deserted island in the Orkneys where Victor Frankenstein had set up his laboratory. He had left data there. He had put his great secret into records and there was no doubt in my mind that I could decipher them and make them my own secrets.

"The laboratory was as he had left it when he broke his promise to me and fled with the creation of my female counterpart scarcely begun. Once there, I hurled myself into intense research, moving slowly but surely over the ground he had pioneered.

"Unable to face men in the light of day, I needed an assistant and found a contemptible scoundrel, Sam Lenz, who suited my purpose.

"With his aid I acquired two bodies, females who had died in a shipwreck. We brought them to the laboratory where I went about constructing the body of my mate. Both bodies had been damaged. The skull of one of them was beyond use, while the rib cage of the other had been smashed beyond repair.

"I dissected them as Frankenstein had done in piecing my own body together and succeeded finally in shaping a vehicle for the creation of my dreams.

"But when I looked upon the result, I was sickened. It was too horrible for even my hardened sensibilities to accept. The females had been of different statures, one much smaller than the other. Therefore, assembling the usable parts brought such a misshapen body into creation that I knew the living being would curse me as deeply as I myself had cursed Frankenstein. Regardless of my yearning, could I commit the same sacrilege as he without proving myself just as vile a monster?

"I turned away from the task, sinking into a pit of deepest despair, no longer sustained now by the hope of someday having a mate.

"Then kindly providence took a hand. It sent me prowling aimlessly over the island of Larswall, with no other intent than being close to the human companionship I craved even though it was not mine to be.

"It was during one of these sad wanderings that I came deep in the night to the church in Larswall. It was deserted save for the curate who knelt at the altar deep in prayer. Behind him stood an open coffin awaiting burial service the following day. I stole for-

ward and looked into it and saw as beautiful a maiden as ever walked this earth. She lay like an angel, still and serene in death, and a yearning welled up within me that dwarfed any previous desire I had experienced. I could hardly forbear seizing that loveliness, aglow even in death, and bearing the maiden off to be mine forever.

"Instead, I retreated as quietly as I had entered and returned to my island to wait.

"The following night found me back in the Larswall graveyard, where I sought out the maiden's resting place. Carefully, most carefully, so there would be no mark of desecration, I entered her cold prison and freed her, returning the earth and sod as it had been before.

"I carried her to Frankenstein's laboratory and applied his secrets, achieved his miracle. With indescribable love welling within me, I watched as life returned to that divine form. My heart pounded like the sea as her eyes opened and she looked about in childlike questioning of new birth.

"But the miracle was not complete. There was more of far greater magnitude. When she looked upon me, my flesh cringing from the expression of horror I expected, there was no such regard. Her lovely eyes turned on me with wonder, nothing more. Then the sweet mouth broke into a smile. I moved forward. She laid a soft hand upon my hideous face and stroked my cheek.

"She was not revolted by my hellish appearance!

"So I come now to the end of my purpose in writing this account. It has achieved a double end. It con-

demns forever the evil Frankenstein and puts the mark of fiend where it belongs, upon him. But also, a result I did not expect when I began—it becomes my cry of final triumph to those who must someday read it. I have won through. My own determination has gained for me a great future happiness in a world where I was condemned without a hearing.

"I shall take my lovely companion to a place where human jackals cannot follow. There we shall live out our lives in peace and contentment.

"I do not know when this narrative will fall into human hands. Perhaps years will pass before anyone sets foot on this deserted island. Perhaps so many years that my beloved and I will have passed from life because I know we are not immortal. As life's last moment must come for natural man, it must come for us also. But in the meantime we will know happiness.

"In ending these words, I give an assurance. My happiness is so great that I bear no ill will toward anyone. I will even forgive Frankenstein as the years pass, and hope I, too, will be forgiven of my sins.

"Let there be love among all mankind, one for another.

"That is my wish."

Journey into Peril

To say that I was stunned puts it mildly. Upon finishing the incredible narrative, I sat helpless. My candle guttered and the darkness of the chamber merged with the darkness of my spirit. The wind outside continued, but now its tones were those of laughter as though Satan himself howled in delight at the results of his evil intrigues. The night hours passed, and with dawn rising I was able to put coherent thought to the situation we faced. Felix had to be informed.

A deep weariness assailed me as I considered all the aspects. A sense of futility perhaps. At any rate, sleep became imperative and instead of awakening Felix I penned a quick note explaining the green journal and where I had found it. I apologized for not acquainting him with its existence sooner and then laid the journal and the note beside his bed.

With that, I retired to my own bed and fell into a trancelike sleep.

I awoke during the noon hour, whereupon Tander's ever-watchful housekeeper came to my bed with a tray of tea and scones. I was most grateful for the warm hospitality of both her and Tander, something I felt we hardly deserved. I tried to thank the good woman but she waved my gratitude aside, her sunny disposition in sharp contrast with the cold, windy weather sweeping past my window.

"Is Mr. De Lacy about?" I asked.

"He is bundled up and sitting in the garden," she replied. "He appears to have recovered nicely from his fevers."

"I am delighted. I shall finish this delicious tea and join him."

I found him as the housekeeper had said, seated in the garden staring pensively at the horizon. He clutched the green journal in his hands.

Each of us waited for the other to speak. A long silence resulted. I seated myself beside him and said finally, "My dear Felix. I must again apologize for not showing you—"

He brushed my words abruptly aside. "No explanation is necessary. I understand your motives. I was hardly in a condition to receive such a startling revelation." He held the journal up and stared at its now somewhat stained cover.

"Did you read the whole of this?"

"I am sure I did."

"The notes he set down in the back—beyond where his dreadful narrative ended?"

"I am not sure that I—"

"They are of some interest—especially this one."

With that, Felix handed me the open journal and I realized I had not read the passages he indicated. Further on in the journal he had used some of the pages to put down what seemed to be personal observations.

"Just there," Felix said, and I put my eyes to the place he indicated.

"At that point in the timeless world I inhabited it was given me to see a great truth; a knowledge beyond all range of normal minds in normal places; one which not even Frankenstein himself realized when he tampered with the Unknown. He was of the opinion that he had charged this hideous body of mine with new life. He saw the invisible from which he drew that life as an infinite reservoir of abstract consciousness which, when charged into the human form through whatever means, changed into functioning consciousness.

"Such is not the case. Functioning entities are already formed in the invisible. They existed at some time in this visible world until death separated them from the bodies in which they lived and moved and had their beings.

"It was not given me to understand why certain of those who lived upon this earth are now bound in that Limbo just beyond. Perhaps their love of life and their regret at being forced to leave it is the bond which

holds them close. Whether or not they are able to return through natural human birth processes and recycle as newborn babes, I know not.

"Of this only I am sure. Frankenstein's evil process allows an unnatural return. Therefore, I existed before. I lived before as a man upon this earth. I was a good man, a gentle man, who wished only goodness and love for all mankind. What I have become is the result of the cruelty and torment I found in this second life."

The item ended there, leaving the balance of the page blank.

"What madness is this?" I cried.

Felix replied, "Insanity or not, I think it gives us some insight into the mentality of the monster we deal with. A brain capable of such philosophies, true *or* false, is indeed keen."

"I agree. You read his narrative?"

Felix nodded.

"And your reaction?"

"Identical with yours, I am sure. Complete shock."

"Do you feel we can accept it as truth?"

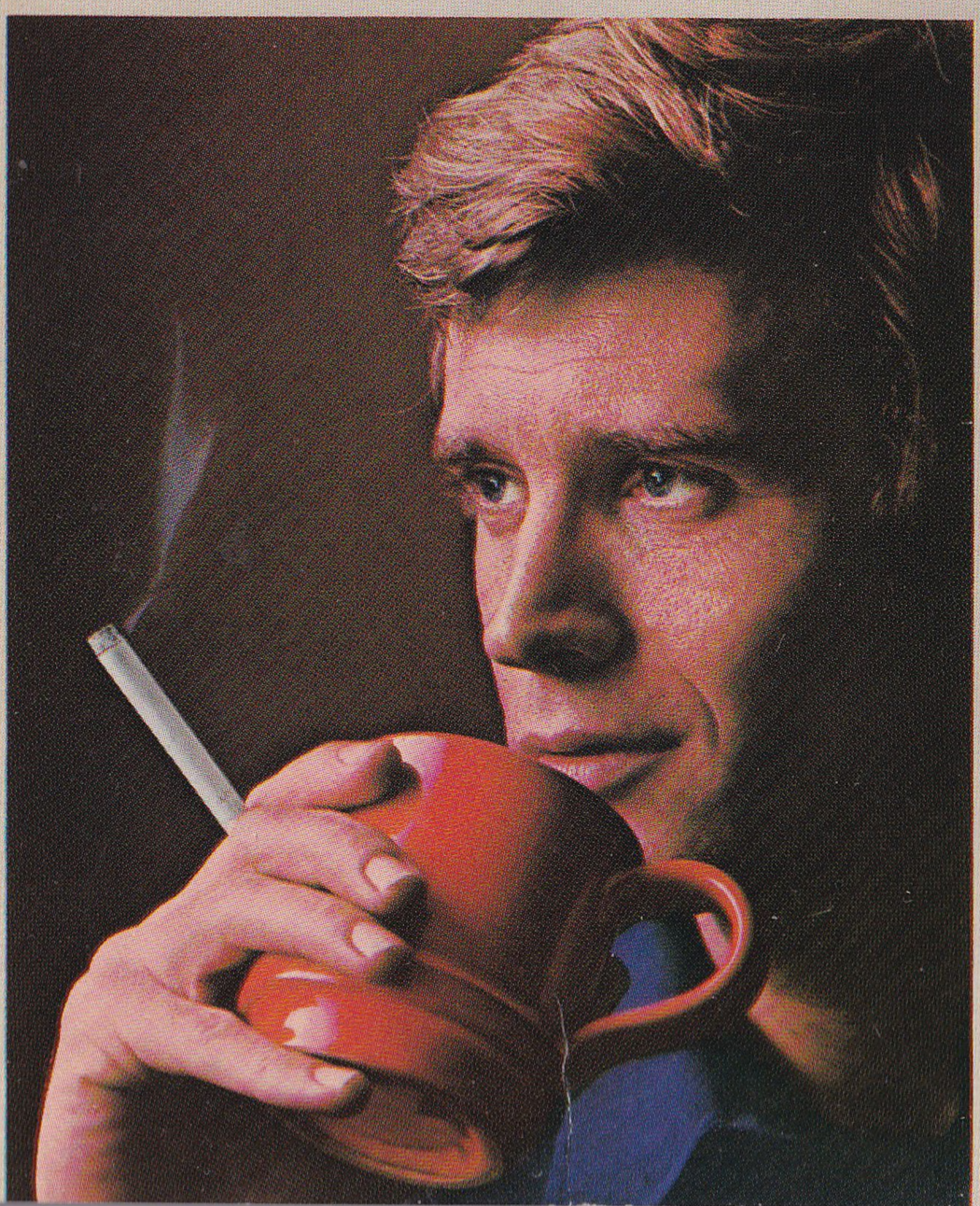
"Who can say? I am inclined to believe that he did go to the Pole to die and that he was trapped in the ice and finally delivered back into the world from which he fled."

"I have accepted that also, though not the rest of it."

"Do you mean that he did not take the dead body of that girl from her grave?"

What a good time for all the good things of a Kent.

Coffee 'n Kent!



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"I am sure he did. What I refer to is his claim to kindness and decency as a human being."

"He wrote with touching pathos. He seemed sincere enough."

"True, but the narrative stopped most conveniently for his cause—before the fiendish murder of Max Gregor."

"That aspect has been in my mind."

"I think it totally negates all his claims to membership in the human race. Obviously, Max Gregor, upon returning to Larswall, again saw his beloved and tried to rescue her. The fiend killed him with the same senseless brutality he confessed in the murder of Frankenstein's friend and bride."

"I cannot disagree with you," Felix said.

"Then you must also agree to the truth that presents itself. That our pious fiend has returned an innocent maiden to the hell of a second life on this earth; to a life of torment and cruelty."

"He said that she feared him not."

"A bald lie in all probability. But if true, he must have written of her first moments; the half-consciousness of rising rebirth. He certainly would not record the later time—when her eyes truly opened and she clearly saw the fiend who had brought her back."

Felix drew his jacket closely around his throat as though the thought of the innocent maid's fate had chilled him more so than the cold wind of the Orkneys.

"What must we do?" he asked.

"I have been giving that some thought."

"Go to the authorities?"

"Each time that idea occurs to me I see poor Max Gregor consigned to a madhouse for having done the same thing."

"An uncomfortable thought. But Max Gregor gave them only his word. We have more. The empty coffin. The hideous laboratory on that deserted island."

"Which is far more evidence than Gregor had, I'll grant. But we face the same barrier of local reluctance. You must not forget that these people turn away from disagreeable things they cannot understand. I think that would defeat us. They would have to be forced to believe. We could not persuade them. Therefore we would need the monster himself, in chains, dragged into their public street at high noon. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise," Felix agreed, "at best they would see us as a pair of very odd fellows with peculiar fixations."

"You put it neatly. I have been thinking also of your obligation in this matter."

"My obligation?"

"You have been moved from the beginning by an obligation to your father. He was of the opinion that the monster was a benign unfortunate rather than a fiend out of hell. You have spent years and much energy in proving otherwise. You did not contract to pursue a monster and bring him to bay; to expend all your active years and perhaps lose your life in the end."

"I cannot deny your logic. Also, I cannot allow you to risk your own life in that same fruitless search. As it is, you faced too great a danger on my petition. Suppose we had come face to face with the fiend there in his laboratory? We would have died, no doubt, as horribly as did Gregor, and I would have been responsible for your death."

"I do not agree with you on that point. What you really did was give me a plausible excuse for embarking upon an exciting adventure."

"And now that adventure is over."

"I must concede that, even though reluctantly. My curiosity is as great as ever, but there is the practical aspect. Up to this point we had certain clues—places to go—a possibility of success. Now we face a blank wall. We have no idea where the monster took the lass. However sincerely we mourn her certain fate, we could search the world fruitlessly for the rest of our days to no avail."

"Which," Felix replied sadly, "terminates any obligation we set for ourselves."

"Then this is the end of the affair?"

"I see no other way."

We arose from our chairs and walked slowly toward the house, confirming our new resolve with this symbol of departure.

"What are your plans?" I asked.

"They are most indefinite. All my life has been shadowed by the sense of duty to my father. Now I imagine I shall spend a little time savoring my new freedom before I take full advantage of it."

"I'm sure you will gain satisfaction looking back upon a duty faithfully fulfilled."

"And you?"

"Your accounts of Australia interested me a great deal. With nothing to tie me down, I shall seriously consider a voyage to our down-under possession."

"I am sure you will not be disappointed. My sister and of course her good husband will make you more than welcome. I shall post a letter to them immediately. . . ."

Thus it was that our Orkney adventure ended and we took leave of our host, giving him earnest assurances that we would reciprocate in kind if he ever visited London.

Our return trip was uneventful and most pleasant. Stopping off in Edinburgh, we debated calling upon Leland Welch and telling him of our findings. We decided against this. So long as we were proceeding no further in the matter such confidences seemed pointless.

We then went on to London where I invited Felix to be my guest and take advantage of what recreation I could afford him. He declined with regret, saying that there were affairs he had neglected and must attend to.

We parted with a warm handshake and every assurance that we would not lose contact.

We had arrived in London quite early that morning, so I had ample time to visit my overseer and get a report on the state of my personal affairs. Happily, I found them in excellent shape, so much so that I re-

warded him in greater measure for his loyalty and devotion to my interests.

I returned to London late that night and, not having unpacked my belongings, I had only to seek sleep in expectation of the morrow. I was up early, mid-morning finding me safely aboard the Dover packet to Calais where I booked transportation to Paris. The rail accommodations were not of the best, but once in the great French city I was able to gain a compartment on the Oriental Express, bound for points south-east. These accommodations were luxurious by comparison and as I relaxed comfortably in my compartment, I opened the monster's green-bound journal, having retained possession of it.

The data on the back pages to which Felix had called my attention were confusing but most interesting withal. They were mostly philosophical, set down in the form of revelation. Frankly, I could make head nor tail of the main bulk. It would have taken a far keener mind—one well versed in the esoteric—to find value in them.

However, one observation of the fiend was expressed more clearly than the others, though it still seemed composed of the wildest hallucinatory impressions.

He had written:

"There came to me a vision of lesser gods, unworthy beings put in charge of human affairs. These were celestially endowed with supernatural power but sadly lacking in the moral stature to be expected of them.

"And it is for their amusement that the affairs of

men are constituted upon a great wheel consisting of an infinite number of smaller wheels, all revolving remorselessly in the Great Void.

"Each small wheel is a Karmic unfolding of interlocking human events. And it was given me to see the Frankenstein Wheel and to know that it revolves unto a second turning and that all would be in this second turning as the first turning had dictated. Nothing new, yet all things new. Nothing which had not been before, yet all parts born anew and fresh and different. Thus did the lesser gods have their sport."

Wild fantasies truly, yet I could not help but contemplate with awe the mind capable of receiving and setting down such oblique thoughts. Truly, the monster had gone through some sort of radical refinement in that icy prison.

Evening began darkening the landscape and my hunger demanded attention. I put the book aside and repaired to the dining car, my thoughts far away as I vaguely sought a table. Then a familiar voice brought me sharply back.

"My dear Henry. Why not dine with me?"

My head jerked around as on a pivot and I was looking down at Felix De Lacy.

The emotions we then experienced were mutual. First, there was the embarrassment which certainly reddened our cheeks. Then the joint effort to find words of explanation. However, no explanation was really needed. The assurance of our brotherly concern, one for the other, was enough. Each of us had tried to turn the other from this perilous mission.

I managed a smile as I sat down at Felix's table, saying, "I presume we are both bound for the same destination."

"The same general area at least."

"I was a fool to assume you would miss the clue to the monster's whereabouts."

"I am as culpable as you on that score. The Valley of the Chamonix—ruined castles high in green forests. I think, however, it was more hope than belief on both our parts—that the other would miss the clue."

"What is your destination, my dear Felix?"

"I plan to detrain at Annecy in the Haute Savoie."

"In the shadow of Mont Blanc," I murmured. "Our tickets read the same."

"And then to turn backward toward the Chamonix."

"We could be totally wrong. Perhaps we underestimate the monster."

"Perish the thought!"

"There is much in our favor. He had no reason to believe we were on his trail. Had he suspected that, he would have remained on that island to destroy us. The journal was a gesture of his vanity. He was writing for the future, not the immediate. It could have been years before anyone stumbled on that island."

"We were such innocents," Felix mused. "Certainly, heaven protected us. Trailing that fiend unarmed—"

"We shall not make that mistake again," I assured him.

"What did you plan after Annecy, Henry?"

I could only shrug. "No clear-cut procedure save

to follow the fiend in the hope of checkmating him—bringing that lass to safety."

"And that we shall. Had you planned to inform the authorities?"

"Not immediately. I saw the situation as being no different from the Orkneys. Unless the fiend has left indisputable marks of his existence, who would believe us?"

"Then we can only hope for a favorable turn of events and be prepared to take advantage of whatever may come. . . ."

Meanwhile, the racing train seemed to creep from town to town—to crawl lazily up tortuous slopes and apply brakes outrageously on the downgrades. But the outskirts of Annecy were finally achieved and then we were billeted in a modest hotel and ready for more extensive planning.

"I think a pair of mounts would be the best solution to our transportation problem," Felix said.

"A carriage would certainly not take us to where we must go."

"But first, we need a map."

We procured a detailed map of the area and studied it carefully. "The going may be rough," Felix said, "but I see no reason why we should lose our way. There is Mont Blanc. And the Valley of the Chamonix is clearly placed."

"We shall move through those villages. Then—well, we have the whole valley as a searching ground."

As I studied the map, I could not help marveling at the guile and cunning through which the fiend had

achieved his destination—if indeed he had—moving by night across all of France with his precious burden.

If indeed he had.

That postulation stood like a great question mark. But the belief that the fiend had not only headed for the Chamonix, but had succeeded in reaching that destination was saturated into my very bones.

This appeared to be Felix's conviction also because he uttered no word of doubt.

We rested that night and the following morning we obtained two sturdy little hill ponies and allowed the mountaineer with whom we dealt to outfit us for our trip into the rugged country. Our last chore was with an armorer in the town. His shop bristled with weapons from which—upon his advice—we selected two rifles fashioned for bear, and a pair of serviceable pistols. Our obvious ineptness with weapons puzzled the man. He suggested a guide. When we vetoed that he fell silent, keeping his doubts to himself.

We left Annecy shortly before noon and had comparatively easy going, reaching our destination, an inn just beyond Bourgeau, by nightfall. Nor did the second day bring problems. We passed through Liege, Briveville, St. Nance, and St. Serres, villages which diminished in size and became more primitively isolated as we approached the awesome bulk of Mont Blanc.

We found quarters in St. Serres, and were objects of curiosity to the concierge and tap-room habitues. When we left the following morning their eyes remained upon us until we vanished.

And now civilization as we were inclined to define it ended. There would be no more inns, no more con-

veniences of accommodation. The road narrowed, vanished, and became a trail. We consulted our map often and now made first use of the compass which was a part of our equipment.

"Nightfall should bring us to the jumping-off place," Felix observed.

And indeed it did. As the sun lowered, we came out upon a promontory with the Valley of the Chamonix spread below us.

It was an arresting sight, the great gorge cut by nature in lordly disregard for the comforts or conveniences of man; the rushing river far below, hurling its waters down toward the gentler slopes.

Beyond us, upriver, we could see a distance of wilder and more inaccessible land where icy cliffs and avalanches were wont to smash down and rip the very rock itself from the walls of the Chamonix gorge.

"If the monster wanted solitude," Felix observed, "he could not have found a better place save at the Pole itself."

We camped there on the promontory and moved on the next day, our sturdy little animals now proving their mettle as they sure-footedly found trails for us where there were no trails. Quickly, the going became infinitely harder, the terrain over which we traveled seemingly fashioned to frustrate any foolhardy wayfarer without the experience to cope with it.

We traveled for three uneventful days, if risking life and limb a dozen times a day can be called uneventful. When we camped upon the evening of the third day a marked depression had settled over us and

I am sure we were both reassessing our true obligations in the matter at hand. First, it could have been a totally fruitless endeavor; but even if that were not the case, there was still the Quixotic nature of our enterprise. The age of chivalry has long since passed, and in these enlightened times it only behooves a citizen to inform the authorities if he suspects evil. He can then go his way with a clear conscience.

In the chill and discomfort of that hostile land we plagued ourselves with such ponderings but neither had the courage to voice a single word of despair, this bravery in itself a reverse form of cowardice.

The following day things got a little better. Through inexperience, we had labored over a vast shoulder in the terrain and now we moved down into still rough, but comparatively less hostile country. These were the forest-covered slopes we'd primarily sought—a wild, though habitable land.

And it was in mid-afternoon of that day that near-tragedy befell us. . . .

The Mark of the Fiend

It came in the form of a rifle ball that crashed into a tree scarce inches from Felix's head. He had the presence of mind to drop instantly to the ground, his mount snorting in surprise and rearing backward.

My own reactions were slower. Felix had to cry out, "Down, you fool! Some idiot is shooting at us!"

I joined him on the ground and none too soon. A second ball penetrated the spot I had lately occupied and sang off into the forest. We now saw the source of the attack. Two small clouds of white powder smoke marked the balls as coming from a clump of bushes some fifty yards away.

"Do you think we were mistaken for game of some sort?" I asked.

It was an inane question, hardly meriting even the negative shake of Felix's head. "Halloo!" he called out. "We are friends. We wish you no harm. Put up your weapon."

Aside from a stirring in the bushes, there was no response.

Felix called out again. "We are harmless travelers. Please allow us to come forward and identify ourselves."

Again, silence. Then a most unexpected reply—a long, agonized moan arising, to hang for long moments in the still air and lapse finally into eerie silence.

"That was a female voice," Felix said.

"A woman! No doubt. But why did she shoot at us?"

"In fear, I would imagine."

Again Felix called out his reassurance that we were not enemies. A faint but unmistakable sobbing was the reply. Our eyes met in a questioning glance and we arose as one and moved forward, sharply alert. The fifty yards seemed a mile at the very least. Then we circled the bushes and looked down upon a terrible sight.

A maiden, perhaps in her early twenties, sat cross-legged on the ground, the hunting weapon she had used lying beside her. She was roughly clad in skins and had it not been for her loose and flowing hair and her delicacy of feature, she could have passed for a young man.

Her state of being was most lamentable. There was a look of fixed horror upon her face, frozen there as though it were a mask. Evidently, after firing the weapon at us, she had fallen into this condition of utter and hopeless despair.

However, we noted her only in passing, our eyes

drawn immediately to the reason for her condition—foul murder, savagely done.

Beside her lay the body of a man. He could have been somewhat older than she and was of stalwart physique, but his strength had been of no avail against his murderer. His leather jacket had been torn aside, the shirt beneath it ripped asunder. Deep and bloody gashes had been torn across his chest and into his upper abdomen. His throat had been ripped as by a ravenous beast.

"My God!" Felix muttered. "Oh, my God!"

My reaction was in kind. In an act of pure reflex I stripped off my greatcoat and laid it over the body to hide the sickening sight of intestines laid open. The maiden's head turned slowly as her eyes followed my action. It was a situation in which words were inadequate. Still, something had to be said.

"Was he—close to you?" I asked.

Her reply was in trancelike tones. "My lover."

Felix's question was more practical. "What can we do? Is your village far from here?"

A listless wave of her hand eastward was her answer, but her mind appeared to remain on my question. "We quarreled. I knew he was unfaithful to me and I accused him. He denied it but he kept going off by himself at night. I followed him and found him—like this."

"Then you have been here since last night?"

"He left the village a little after midnight."

"You have not gone for help. Will your people find you?"

"They are hunting, no doubt."

"Perhaps the shots will bring them."

The girl's directions would have been of little help in finding her village and now she slipped completely back into the lethargy from which our arrival had apparently jarred her. Felix and I debated our wisest course. We fired several more shots in the hope that we could thus direct a search party. Then, when we were about ready to give up hope of aid from the maid's village, there came sounds from the brush and three men approached swiftly.

They were as primitively clad as the girl; stolid peasant types and obviously born woodsmen. They were no doubt shaken by what they saw but their emotions remained under control. Two of them went directly to the stricken maid while the third, apparently the leader, turned his grim attentions upon Felix and me.

Even though we made no hostile move he gripped his weapon alertly as he asked, "Why are you here?"

I replied, "We came on this tragedy a short time ago and tried to help as best we could."

This appeared to satisfy him. He turned from us to the girl and lifted her and took her in his arms. Meanwhile, one of the other men handed back my greatcoat while the other laid pine branches over the body.

"Wait here," the leader ordered the two men. Then to us with a gesture of his hand: "Come with me." When we turned toward our mounts, he said, "Leave them. They will be brought later," and he strode off through the forest, bearing the stricken girl in his arms.

The village was a small one, possibly one hundred souls; their houses were sturdy dwellings of trimmed logs placed one above the other on an open slope.

Villagers appeared upon our approach but there was no crowding forward in a quest for information. Grim silence contained them as they watched. All eyes were upon Felix and me as we followed our competent woodsman toward one of the houses.

We mounted a log stairway up from the street to the porch of the house where a door stood opened for us. We were ushered into a crude but well-furnished room. Our guide turned his burden over to the motherly woman who had greeted us in silence. As she led the maid away the man said, "Wait," and disappeared through another doorway.

Felix and I stood silent. We were highly impressed by the admirable self-control of these people. Living a hard life in a hard land, they had learned to meet adversity with no waste of emotion.

The man reappeared a few minutes later. As he hurried past us he gestured toward the door through which he'd come and said, "Mayor Benet."

He obviously meant that we should enter, which we did, and were greeted by a man with one good arm, the other sleeve pinned to his shirt. His voice, when he spoke, was deep, as befit his huge chest.

"Please sit down, gentlemen," he said. "I am Jacques Benet. Vincent gave me your names."

We identified ourselves individually and Benet brought forth a wine carafe. "We are grateful for your help. Marie all alone—stricken—"

"There was so little we could do."

"You gentlemen are on a hunt?"

I met Felix's eyes in a quick glance. During our companionship, we had come into surprisingly close rapport. He understood my silent question: *the truth?* A slight nod of his head told me he agreed, whereupon I replied, "Yes. A hunt, but one of unique proportions. We pursue a fiend."

At that moment there was an interruption. The door opened and a boy of perhaps seven or eight years of age burst childlike into the room. He cried, "Father, I—" Then he saw us and broke off, abashed.

Benet extended his arm as the boy ran to him. Speaking gently, he said, "Stephen, you must play quietly in your room. Genevieve is busy and I must talk with these gentlemen."

"There has been trouble?" the boy asked.

"Yes," was the grave reply, whereupon the boy bowed to us politely and left the room.

Benet stroked his chin. "You were saying—?"

"Our story is an incredible one. It cannot be told in moments."

Benet was a man of depth and intelligence. He studied our faces for several long moments before replying, "Paul's savage death was not the first here in our forests. Another of our young men died as horribly only a month ago."

"Appalling," Felix muttered.

"You must remain with me. We have quarters to accommodate you. You will want to rest while I go about some duties which press me." He paused, frowning, as though trying to shape his words. Then he said, "I am the mayor of this village by election

only. My position is not official. We are so situated that reaching the vested authorities is difficult. Therefore, we handle our own affairs as much as possible."

He came to his feet and caught my inadvertent glance at his empty sleeve. He looked down at it with a slight smile. "A bear," he said. "Torn off years ago."

Felix asked, "Could your recent deaths be attributed to the same manner of attack?"

Benet shook his head. "No. The first one, perhaps, but not Paul. He was a skilled hunter and well armed. Had a bear killed him the beast would have died also." He straightened his shoulders and was indeed an arresting figure at his full height. I visualized with awe the savage fight which must have taken place when his arm was lost.

"I will show you to your chamber. At dinner we will talk further."

The dinner was served by the woman who had taken the lass in charge—obviously the Genevieve our host had referred to. During the meal he dwelt upon pleasant subjects—the village and the people, their means of livelihood, which consisted mainly of trapping, wood carving, and small farming. After dinner we were led back into Benet's study where wine was served. When the woman left he raised his eyes expectantly.

"And now—?"

Felix glanced at me and I accepted the role of narrator. I said, "If you will bear with me in patience. . . ." Then I went on to acquaint him with each nightmare detail of our investigation from the mo-

ment my interest had been stirred by Max Gregor's madness.

Benet listened in silence, his expression never changing, his interest never flagging. When I finished, he stunned us with a simple statement, completely devoid of emotion: "Your monster has been seen."

Felix came half to his feet. "Pray, where? Tell us, man!"

Benet would not be hurried. "One of our villagers, a woman out gathering firewood, returned with the mad story of our first murder. It was through her that we found the horribly mutilated body."

"She saw the fiend?"

"There was more. She claimed to have seen your monster bearing a beautiful girl away through the woods. We did not believe her story because the woman has a reputation for fanciful tales. We put it down to hysteria and distorted vision."

"But she spoke truly!"

"Now it would seem so. The murdered youth had a waywardness in him. It was claimed by some that he slipped off on moonlit nights to consort with a beautiful maiden in the forest. That sounded like sheerest nonsense. No lone female, however self-reliant, could have found refuge anywhere but here in the village. So we drew our own conclusions—that the youth was killed by a savage animal, perhaps a bear, and that in her hysteria the woman conjured up her fantastic tale."

"The truth now seems obvious," I said. "That poor lass the fiend took from her grave and recharged with life has twice sought escape into human arms. Twice

the monster has followed and snatched her back into hell, savagely destroying the two men who sought to rescue her."

"That now seems a more likely explanation," Benet replied gravely.

"Tell me, good sir, are there any deserted castles in this vicinity—any places which might serve as a refuge?"

"There are several upstream on the valley walls to the northeast, where the river forms maelstroms and the walls are high."

"But surely they must be visited from time to time."

He shook his head. "Hardly. Our people here and in the other villages stand in fear of them. A superstitious fear. Even the boldest hunters avoid them because game abounds in less inaccessible places. They were built in another age and tenanted by robber barons and scoundrels who gave liege only to distant kings and ruled like despots. A breed long gone from our land."

"There must be such a place not too distant from this village."

"Aye. There is. Some five miles upriver, high on the valley wall. The road has fallen away. Reaching it would be difficult."

"But reach it we must!"

Benet did not deny this, but his preoccupation was such that I suspected something was being withheld. He frowned into the fire for some moments. Then he touched a bell on the table beside him and Genevieve appeared.

"Please have Maurice Beauvais called here," he said. "Say I would speak with him."

When she left he turned to us. "The village gossip concerning the forest enchantress has persisted," he said. "Three young men, to my knowledge, have been accused of seeking her out. Two are now dead. We shall speak to the third."

The young man came promptly. He was a handsome youth, not so broadly muscled as the older man but masculine and virile withal.

There was hostility in his eyes and his mouth was sullenly slanted as he faced Benet. The latter said, "Maurice, these gentlemen have brought grave news to the village—word of a murderous savage hiding in our forests and a beautiful maiden. Have you seen the girl?"

"I have seen no one."

His anger and stubbornness were too obvious to be ignored. Benet said, "Come, Maurice. You have seen what happened to Rene and Daniel."

"They were fools."

"You astound me. They were your friends."

"Neither was my friend."

"You have seen the girl?"

"I have seen nothing."

"You have met with her in the forest. There have been trysts."

"There was nothing, I tell you!"

"When is your next rendezvous?"

"I know of no such girl!"

Anger flared in Benet's eyes also, but he controlled

it. "Are you so enamoured of her that you have lost all reason?"

I felt that the youth was on the edge of confession. His dark eyes smouldered. Then his lips stiffened and the moment was past.

"I have been guilty of nothing."

Benet sighed. "No, I am sure you haven't. I dismiss you."

The youth stalked out. Benet sighed. "He was not being truthful."

Felix murmured, "Young men in love—"

"Exactly. I will have him watched."

"A wise move," I agreed. "In the meantime, should we not investigate that castle?"

"Most certainly. Tomorrow morning we will take men and climb the valley wall."

"We must be well armed. The monster will not submit, I am sure."

Benet's face was grim. "If it is human we will prevail. The fiend can be no more vicious than a brace of our black bears defending their young."

He said no more, but his words told clearly of savage battles between his village hunters and the great wild beasts of their forests.

"Now you will want rest," he said, and the evening was ended. . . .

Castle of Evil

We started the next morning with the sun quartered in the eastern sky. Benet had selected a half-dozen hunters. They were fine specimens, their presence lending a decided air of security.

We moved along the floor of the valley where the going was easiest, the frothing river whipping past us. High above, upriver, the lordly, snow-covered peaks reared against the blue of heaven. There was a solemn beauty in all this and I well understood why Frankenstein would have come here to ask God's forgiveness for his great crime.

This brought the monster's esoteric theory to mind —the vision he claimed to have experienced: his Frankenstein Wheel. True or false, we had certainly come in the same circle. From the Chamonix to the bleak Orkneys, destiny had directed Victor Frankenstein's restless feet. Now we were returning to the

Chamonix where the monster's existence would be ended. If there were any doubt of that last in my mind, I had only to glance at the grim faces of Benet's hunters.

The gray aerie where some robber baron of old had nested now came into our view. High on its forest-bound perch, it looked like the gray scab of a wound which had long festered and was now a monument to forgotten iniquities.

The trail upward had been obliterated by rock falls and the going became more difficult. The hunters led the way, helping Felix and me as best they could. I fear we were the targets of doubtful glances now. Having represented ourselves as able hunters in our own right, these men felt we should have been less burdensome in the hard going.

Traces of the old trail were found at times and we came finally to the outer gate of the castle, of what was left of it, a battered ruin. The entrance to the great hall inside was without a door, the huge beams smashed and sagging as though from savage assault at some distant time.

Within, there was only brooding semi-darkness and I noted a change in the men. They were thoroughly at home with things they understood, things of honest night and day under the open sky. But here, a mood of the macabre, the brooding supernatural, saturated the ancient walls. Hollow, ringing sounds echoed from each footstep while the shadowed crypts looked to hide the souls of evil men rejected by heaven, unwanted by hell.

A frown of disappointment came upon Benet's face.

"Only marauding wolves have visited this place," he said.

It appeared that his judgment was well founded. There was not even the faintest mark of habitation.

Benet scowled up into the dimness. "It grows late," he said, "and the place is huge. We will search in pairs. At sight of any danger, call out quickly."

It was left for Felix and me to search below. On the left side of the great hall we found a stone stairway winding downward and followed it cautiously, coming finally to a large, low-ceilinged room outlined vaguely in gathering darkness.

"A moment," Felix said, pawing at the wall. He came away with a pine torch from a wall bracket. The pitch forming its wick end was brittle with age but it flared brightly at the touch of a match. The yellow rays lit the room and we gasped in horror.

This was the long-departed despot's torture chamber with the bones of victims still hanging in chains from the walls. A skeleton was stretched upon a torture rack, its knees disjointed, the discs of its spine not joined. Another skeleton lay with its lower extremities in what had been a glowing forge. The bones of the feet and ankles were charred away.

Above, in a steel cage, hung the remains of an unfortunate still clad in the rags he had worn at death. While round about lay the smaller skeletons, those of rats, which testified to food more foul than even their stomachs could digest.

"My God!" Felix muttered. "What force of circumstance left these wretches to die?"

"Perhaps justice of a sort."

"What do you mean?"

"It appears to me that this castle was breeched by the despot's enemies and that what we see was the terrible end of the tyrant himself, left here perhaps by a foe stronger and even more savage."

"I guess it no longer matters," Felix mused. "It was all finished and forgotten so very long ago." He crossed himself. "May they rest in peace."

"Not likely," I replied.

Then from above there came a call. "Halloo! Halloo! Up here!"

We hurried back up the stairs and approached the grand staircase, still intact. There on the second level we met a team of hunters who were also answering the call. We accompanied them up a more narrow stairway, went through an arched doorway, and stared in wonder at what was revealed. A beautifully furnished apartment.

"Your monster was here," Benet said. "He and his enchantress."

The walls were hung with tapestries. There were animal skin rugs on the floor and logs in the fireplace of such size that only a superman could have carried them.

Benet motioned and we followed him into the next room. It was a lady's bedchamber, most sumptuously furnished. The bed sat on a dais and was curtained in gold cloth. The walls were tapestried brilliantly in scenes of royal courts. A great bear rug, the skin of a tremendous beast, centered upon the floor. All in all, we beheld a scene of such incongruous splendor that we could find no words.

One of the hunters, as puzzled as the rest of us, had a question for Benet. "You said the monster *was* here."

"They have fled—both of them."

Any proof of this eluded me. True, he was not present at the moment, but I saw no reason to be sure he had made a final departure.

I was upon the verge of arguing the point, but then I noted the total faith with which the men accepted Benet's word. This set him apart as a remarkable leader indeed. If Benet said it, it was so. With this in mind, I held my peace. Obviously, this man's knowledge and instincts were far more dependable than my own superficial observations.

"Why did he flee?" I asked.

Benet's manner reflected his own great disappointment. "Who knows? I would say he is possessed of a keen intelligence."

"We can vouch for that," Felix stated.

"He knew we were searching for him. Or he knew we would search—possibly before we knew it ourselves. He may have seen you in the forest and, knowing the information you would bring, saw his hiding place as no longer safe."

"We did not know he was even aware of our existence."

"We have probably been underestimating his intelligence even while admiring it," Felix said. Felix was still in the throes of his wonder at the furnishings of the place. "How did he do it? How did he assemble all this luxury?"

"A golden prison for that unfortunate lass," I mused.

"Much is explained here," Benet went on. "There

has been word of mysterious lootings in the down-river towns—even as far as Annecy. This is no doubt the answer, but it takes nothing from the incredible dimensions of the monster's accomplishments."

I noted a stir of uneasiness in the men. Their superstitious fear of the unknown was coming to the fore. Brave as lions against natural forces, their blades wavered when they faced the incredible. While nothing of the supernatural had been witnessed here, the whole thing smacked too much of necromancy.

One of them glanced out through a window. "Sunset will soon be upon us," he murmured. His meaning was clear. He did not want to be trapped by lowering night in this place of brooding evil.

Benet agreed but for more practical reasons. "True," he said. "Getting back to the valley floor is hard enough in daylight. We would be wise to leave immediately."

So we quitted the apartment and made our way out into the precipitous forest with the sun still lighting our way. The descent was not as exhausting as the ascent, but care was still needed to avoid the disaster of a possible broken limb.

We reached the valley floor without mishap and moved with greater speed toward a fresh disaster undreamed of at the moment. . . .

The Walking Dead

We reached the village long after night had fallen, Felix and I, weary to our very bones. Neither of us saw anything amiss, but Benet came to an abrupt halt at the lower end of the village street. He held up a peremptory hand.

"Is something wrong?" I asked.

It turned out that the silence itself was what had alerted Benet. Its deathlike quality told us nothing but Benet muttered, "The village is empty."

This was not quite the case. Many of the cottages were lit and as we approached one of the doors opened and a woman came forth. She hurried to Benet's side.

"There has been trouble?" he demanded.

"Stephen, your son. He wandered away early in the afternoon. He did not return with sundown. All the men are out searching."

The gravity of the news was apparent in the obvious

effort Benet exerted in controlling himself. He looked up at the dark sky and said, "The weather is favorable. The boy will be found."

His huntsmen came forward to surround him. They remained silent, awaiting orders, and I realized that the peril of the situation did not need expression. The good weather was a boon but it did not preclude an attack by savage animals upon the helpless child.

As though to emphasize that peril, there came now from the depths of the dark forest the long sonorous howl of a wolf. Under the circumstances, it was not difficult to interpret it as a cry of savage triumph: a reporting of the lad's body already torn and devoured in bestial victory.

"Where have the men gone?" Benet asked.

"They left word at the church," the woman replied.

"We will go there to lay our own search plans," Benet ordered, and no man in the group made the slightest murmur of protest. The weariness from a long, strenuous day was forgotten.

"We shall go also," I assured Benet, but he shook his head.

"That would not be well. You could not help in the forests at night. You would only be a burden."

This was true, and we could only accept it. We watched as the men hurried off. Then Felix and I turned toward Benet's house where Genevieve, her face pale and taut from worry, gave us details.

"The boy goes often into the near forests to play but he never strays beyond a safe distance. This evening when he did not come back as usual, an hour be-

fore supper, I spread the word to the men of the village. They searched. He was nowhere in the closer woods. They returned and prepared themselves and sectioned off the farther forests for a search." She stopped, near to tears. Then she regained control and added, "Nothing has been heard since—not of the boy nor the searchers."

We tried to comfort her as best we could, taking the optimistic viewpoint as one always does in such situations. She thanked us with a wan smile and gave us tea and supper, after which we retired to our chamber and sought our beds.

While my physical weariness was intense, I still slept lightly. I came sharply awake several times to hear Genevieve moving restlessly about on the floor below. Once I awakened to hear her sobbing.

Heavy footsteps on the porch brought me to clear wakefulness after dawn had broken. I dressed and hurried downstairs to find Benet seated at table with untouched food before him. His wan, drawn face told of a man close to physical collapse. There was no need to ask about the success or failure of the night's work.

"The men are exhausted," Benet said. "I can ask no more of them at the present time. I shall eat and return to the forests."

"I insist that you accept our help, De Lacy's and mine," I said. "We will not be a burden during the daylight hours and may be of help."

"You are kind," he replied. "Perhaps if you were to confine your search to the near woods in the perimeter

of the village. There are many small rock caves and cul-de-sacs even there. A thorough stone-by-stone search may prove profitable."

Profitable to a point of finding a small, dead body, was my thought, but I did not voice it. Genevieve had brought my breakfast by that time, and Felix's inquiring face appeared in the doorway. With a murmured apology for his tardiness, he came to the table and was served morning tea. He had scarcely lifted his cup, however, when the sound of approaching villagers brought us to our feet.

We went to the porch and saw returning hunters, a dozen or so, four of whom carried a blanket-wrapped burden. Women and children trailed behind them.

As we watched with direst apprehension, the group turned up the slope and approached Benet's house. Nothing was said, and now there were no sounds except the heavy footsteps of the men.

Benet's eyes were fixed upon the covered burden as on hell itself. I moved close and laid a sympathetic hand upon his shoulder. I am sure he did not feel my touch, however. He was a man far away in a special torture chamber of his own.

The four bearers laid the covered form down on the floor of the porch. One of them bent to uncover it, but another, his eyes upon Genevieve, motioned him to hold.

"Send the woman inside, Jacques," the man said quietly.

Benet did not seem to hear, and it was Felix who took her gently by the arm. "It is best," he said, and

led her to the doorway. She went inside and he closed the door after her.

Now the unveiling was accomplished, and so great was the wanton butchery upon the body revealed, so horrible the mutilation, that I did not at first recognize the tragic victim of violence.

Then, as I, too, placed him, Felix whispered, "The young man who would tell us nothing."

"Maurice Beauvais," Benet rasped in muted tones which came from deep in his massive chest. "Maurice —Maurice. Rash youth!"

Felix and I had viewed the remains of the previous victim, and it seemed to me that it should have conditioned us to some extent for what now lay before us. This was not the case. Rather, it seemed the first experience put us in the category of the child once burned who doubly dreads a second contact with fire.

My every sensibility heaved in violent protest against the butchered cadaver. The long, catlike gouges across the torso, the vilely disfigured face, sent waves of nausea sweeping through me. I felt a weight against my arm and turned to see Felix's ashen face. A shudder went through him and he lowered his head, unable to look further upon the terrible sight.

One of the hunters took pity on him, murmuring, "It is no disgrace to turn from this horror."

Then the blanket was dropped back over the corpse and I turned my attention to the silent Benet. I pitied him in that the very nature of human reactions forced him to experience relief upon viewing a young man's tortured, defiled body—relief that the victim was not

his son. What a cruelty to impose upon a truly compassionate man!

"Take him to the church," Benet ordered. "Those close to him have been told?"

Word was hardly necessary, what with the size of the village and the commensurate speed of communication.

"Take him to the church and then return here. We will talk."

The men returned in due time and were given brandy, followed by the thick, nourishing soup for which, we had learned, Genevieve was famous. Then the story was told by the hunter who had come upon the body.

"Maurice must have suffered greatly," he said. "I was searching a rock chasm for signs of little Stephen when I heard a groaning upon my left. I went in that direction and came to a pleasant glade, a sylvan place where a brook ran down over the rocks. I saw green grass, stained with his blood. Then I saw Maurice and the terrible mutilation which had been inflicted upon him. I was horrified to find him still alive; it would have been so much more merciful if he could have expired quickly. I bent to his aid and it was as though he had lived only through a need to see a sympathetic human face, because he died in a few moments with a great sigh of relief."

Silence followed the telling; a silence broken by Benet, who said, "A sylvan glade, you say? A place for a romantic rendezvous?"

"Ideally suited."

"But there was no sign of the temptress?"

"None. Nor of the monster you sought at the old feudal castle."

"You were alone at the time?"

"Quite alone."

"Then perhaps it is your good fortune that you did not come face to face with the fiend." Benet rose quickly to his feet. "But now you must rest. There is a limit to human endurance and that of all of you has been strained to the utmost."

"You will rest also, Jacques?" came the question.

"I shall set out again. I must use the daylight hours."

"And you would have us sleep them away?"

Visibly moved, Benet turned away to hide his emotion. "We will wait for you at the church," one of the men said, and they left the house.

Benet followed soon after and I went to our room to find Felix staring out the window. He turned as I entered, then passed a hand across his eyes.

"For the amusement of lesser gods! Could any explanation of tragedy piled upon tragedy be more callous? More cynical?"

"The monster's philosophies matter little now, my dear Felix. His destruction is the order of the day. I suggest we serve what purpose we can by exploring the nearer ground about the village as Benet suggested."

"I am with you wholeheartedly," Felix replied. "I carry a great guilt in this affair."

"Guilt?"

"A feeling that my interest in the monster, dating back to my childhood, has brought tragedy down

upon these people. As though I have stirred a nest of vipers."

"You do yourself an injustice. Your influence has been positive rather than negative. Had we not come upon this scene, Benet's people would still be totally in the dark as to the nature of the menace they face."

"You comfort me, Henry. But I shall literally shout for joy when the beast is destroyed."

"There will be a general shouting, I am sure. And now, let us bestir ourselves. . . ."

We arrived at the little village church to find great preparations in the making. Two donkeys were being loaded with supplies and the men were looking to their weapons with exceptional care. Benet, sensing our questions, explained.

"The creature must be run to earth. And with the near castle deserted, he has obviously sought out another, farther up the valley. Therefore, we mount this expedition with the intention of following through to a finish. From this moment on there shall be no turning back."

"What about young Stephen?"

"The search will go on in this vicinity. But my obligation to the village must stand over my personal loss. Three savage deaths demand all-out war. God grant my boy is safe."

With that he turned from us and took his overloaded heart elsewhere—in among the men—to stifle his grief in the fierce activity of preparation.

"I think perhaps he has given up hope," Felix said.

"Hardly that!"

"I mean for the life of his son."

"Perhaps. But there must be no let-up in the search. I suggest we go forth and do what we can."

Felix agreed, so we armed ourselves and moved off into the near forest. . . .

We searched industriously until the sun was well past its meridian. Then hunger drove us back to the village. After we had fortified ourselves with bowls of Genevieve's excellent soup, we chose another segment of the forest and went on with our tedious work, burrowing thoroughly into every nook and cranny large enough to conceal the body of a dead or injured child.

In my case, each hidden place quickened the beating of my heart for fear of what I would find. Again and again, I searched out rocky caves in the rough terrain with fear and hope; until continual disappointment dulled the sharpness of my anticipation and the search became but a depressing routine. I was convinced that the boy was nowhere in that vicinity.

Felix and I searched independently but were careful to remain within earshot of each other. And thus it was, late in the afternoon, that a cry from Felix stopped my breath and choked my heart into my throat.

"Henry! Come! Come!"

I rushed to his side, covering the two-hundred-meter gap at all possible speed. I found him standing motionless, staring into a pocket where time and some natural disaster had hollowed out the trunk of a great tree.

A woman sat in this sheltered spot. She sat erect and did not appear to be in any great physical distress.

Her mental and emotional state, however, was another matter. In all my years I had never seen a face so completely empty—eyes which expressed complete horror by expressing nothing but a chilling, crawling emptiness.

Felix had done nothing. He stood there staring in helplessness as I came to his side. "She is not dead," he whispered. "For all that look of death upon her face, the poor creature's bosom still rises and falls."

I heard my own voice filtering thinly through my shock. "Madam, may we be of assistance?" The ridiculousness of my absurdly polite query struck me only lightly as I bent forward and peered into the woman's face. There was no response.

"Are you from the village?" Felix asked.

I thought I saw the faintest movement of her eyelids, but I could not be sure.

"She does not appear to be injured," Felix said.

"Not physically at least," I replied. "We must get her back to the village immediately.

I extended a hand very gently and laid it on her arm. "Do not fear us," I said. "We are here to help you."

There was no reaction but when I applied lifting pressure to her arm she did not resist.

Felix joined me and together we brought her slowly to her feet. Once erect, she shuddered slightly as though becoming aware of our presence for the first time. Then her lips moved. They opened and then closed and the expression of emptiness returned. Felix looked at me questioningly. "What did she say?"

My ear had chanced to be close to her lips at the time and I had heard her words. Still, I answered with some hesitation. " 'Unless I am mistaken,' she said, 'I have looked upon the face of the dead'—"

"Then she has seen the boy," Felix cut in, "and we now know the worst."

"I am not too sure. There was more. She added, 'the walking dead.' "

We exchanged questioning looks, then gave our whole attention to moving the woman slowly toward the village. She was like an animated doll, responding to our directions and help most submissively, but making no moves of her own volition.

The villagers assembled quickly as we approached, gathering about us in great concern and curiosity.

"Does anyone know this woman?" I asked.

One of them replied. "It is Madeleine Pru. She is a widow who gathers herbs for a living."

"We found her in the forest. Does anyone know how long she has been away from the village?"

No one did, exactly. As the spokesman explained: "Madeleine lives alone, so her comings and goings are not greatly noticed. She is a brave woman. Sometimes she leaves and does not return until the following day."

We took her to the good Genevieve who received her with compassionate regard. "The poor creature! She has suffered. We must help as best we can."

Genevieve took charge, putting the woman to bed while Felix and I sat on the porch and discussed the situation. We got nowhere with so little data to guide us, and arose eagerly when Genevieve came to report:

"She would eat nothing, nor does she sleep. Her eyes remain open in that fixed stare. It is most heartbreaking."

Felix, as deeply troubled as I, said, "Perhaps if you attended her, Henry. Alone. A single attendant might be less confusing to her."

I accepted the mission, going quietly to her chamber with Genevieve and seating myself beside her bed. After a few minutes Genevieve left and I leaned forward and gently closed the woman's eyes. Again, she was submissive, the lids remaining down, the eyes staying closed.

I withdrew my hand quickly, the act too similar to that of closing a dead person's eyes.

She was breathing evenly and certainly in no physical pain, so I could only sit there and wonder what horrors were passing across the screen of her muted mind.

I spoke to her in a quiet voice. "Can you hear me, Madeleine?"

There was a reaction of sorts. The work-worn fingers, locked just below her breast, moved slightly.

"You are safe. Whatever evil you witnessed cannot harm you now."

Again the fingers moved, but that was all. I remained there, hoping the shock would pass while decrying my own inexperience in such matters and wishing mightily for the help of my good friend, Leland Welch, far away in Edinburgh. And I vowed that if Madeleine got no better I would see to it that she be taken there for expert treatment.

Later in the day, after some discussion, Genevieve

and I saw to her physical needs. I held the woman's head at a rising angle while Genevieve spooned some soup into her mouth. She swallowed it obediently so we continued, giving her a reasonable amount in the hope of bolstering her strength.

Then I remained by her bedside, spelled by Genevieve and, at times, Felix. But the latter accepted the temporary obligations reluctantly, which seemed a facet of his nature—as though fearful that she would die while he could only watch helplessly.

The day passed. The night set in while I waited there at her bedside for I knew not what. My candle flickered at times, throwing dark shadows about the room. The silence was so deep as to be a lulling whisper in my ears and I slept. . . .

I was awakened by a voice which seemed to come from far away; by words repeated in a flat monotone; a litany of horror. "The walking dead—the walking dead—the walking dead. . . ."

I struggled back from sleep and cleared my bleary vision as I laid a hand upon her forehead. It was cool and moist. Her eyes had opened and there seemed to be more life in them.

"Are you hungry?" I asked.

She ignored the question, but her eyes remained open. I could see her vitality returning. My diagnosis was that of a layman, but I judged that her animal strength was her salvation. The hard life she led, the solid peasant stock she came from, made her far less destructible than a refined gentlewoman would have been under the same circumstances.

"Can you tell me what happened?" I asked, not greatly hoping for a coherent reply.

"The walking dead."

"I know. But what was your experience?"

Her eyes did not meet mine. They stared at the shadowy ceiling as though her nightmare was being relived there before her.

"I found a boy."

"What boy," I asked, and words poured out.

"Stephen Benet. The mayor's son. I was far over beyond the Pinnacle. I upbraided him for going so far from home. He laughed and helped me pick herbs. We were on our knees together digging in the earth. A shadow covered us. I looked up and saw—"

Her eyes widened. They darted to my face in the sudden terror of trapped birds. I laid a quick hand on her arm. "Easy. You are safe here. No one will harm you. Perhaps you should rest now."

But sleep was not in her. She turned her gaze back to the ceiling.

"A dead man stood over us. The walking, living dead. He had a horrible corpse's face. His eyes were such as could burn a person's flesh. I could not scream. I could not move. The boy stared at the creature, frozen with fear. The creature extended a hand. It was a dead hand, the flesh brown and hardened. The hand of a dried cadaver. The skin on the knuckles was worn through, showing yellow bone. The creature turned his eyes upon the boy and reached the hand down to seize him. This brought life back to me. I screamed and threw myself at him—"

Her terror was rising. She lifted herself from the

pillow and it seemed imperative to intervene. I eased her back down, saying, "Gently, gently. Blot the vision out until your full strength returns."

I must confess that my sole consideration was not for the woman. From what she had said, I wrote my own ending to her story and I could not bear to hear it. The savage slaughter of the village men was bad enough. But to have the torture and killing of a child etched out for me in cold words was too much. So it was my own sensibilities I was considering as well as hers.

She lay momentarily exhausted, her eyes closed. Then she opened them and continued as though the telling were a necessary purge for her own well-being.

"He took me by the shoulder in his great hand and lifted me as he would have lifted a doll. He held me high from the ground and looked full into my face. He opened his mouth, I thought to speak. But he did not speak. I looked down his great dark throat. It was like staring into a tunnel leading to hell. He lifted his other hand. I saw to my horror that it was not the mate of the hand grasping my shoulder. It was larger and had more the look of death about it. I thought he intended to tear my head off as the great fingers curled into a giant claw. I am not a brave woman. I cried out for mercy—"

I took her trembling hand in mine and held it there. "On the contrary," I said, "you are the bravest woman I have ever met."

"I tried to consign my soul to heaven while I searched for words to plead for the boy. I closed my

eyes and waited for the hand to grip my throat. It did not. He passed it over my head and down my cheek with great clumsiness. The leather skin scraped my flesh. I whimpered my fear. Then the grip on my shoulder lessened and I fell to the ground. I opened my eyes and saw that he had picked up the boy. The boy was limp and helpless from fear. The creature held him against his shoulder and turned away. I screamed and got to my feet and tried to follow. I pleaded desperately. The creature turned. Now his face was vicious. His growl was that of a savage animal. His other arm swept out. I cringed away, only to fall and strike my head. Then he was gone. He moved so swiftly off into the forest that I could scarce believe it. I have seen the antelope flee but I tell you he moved more swiftly. I have seen the great bear at bay before the hunters. His strength was greater. He moved and breathed and his eyes blazed. Yet he was dead. My head pained me from the fall. The last of my strength vanished. I had scarce enough strength to crawl to the place you found me. I waited there for him to return and kill me. I do not know how long. Then you came."

The recital taxed her strength. This time when I put her back on her pillow and bade her rest, she obeyed me.

A short time later Genevieve entered the room. "It is almost morning," she said. "You need sleep. If you think she needs attendance, I will stay."

Seeing that Madeleine now slept more normally, I told Genevieve her presence would not be necessary, and we went together into the kitchen where she made tea and we sat together at the table.

I recounted Madeleine's story. Genevieve listened in silence until the end of it. Then emotion brought her close to the tears she strove to control.

"My God in heaven. That poor child. What will be his fate in the hands of that monster?"

I would like to have given her comfort, but any effort I could have made in that direction would have reeked of sophistry. My own sensibilities quailed at the images of cruelty Madeleine's account had conjured up.

"We can only pray for God's intervention," I said. "Perhaps the mercy of heaven will yet prevail."

We finished our tea and while I sat pondering what course to follow, Felix came into the kitchen. Genevieve poured him tea and then retired.

I again recounted Madeleine's story and Felix considered it gravely but without comment, even after I had finished. I finally asked him for his reaction.

"I feel only a great personal futility—guilt at being so ineffectual," he replied.

"Have done with useless castigations," I replied rather sharply. "Let us, rather, try to find some course of action wherein we can be of value."

When he refused comment, I went on. "One thing does become apparent. Benet's search is a correct procedure. The monster has no doubt taken the boy to one of the more distant castles where the men will eventually run him to earth. We can only hope the boy will still be alive when they reach him."

"I fear their search will be fruitless," Felix said.

"For what reason? If you feel the monster's strength

and ferocity can stand even against Benet's determination, I do not agree."

"I have no opinion upon that point, Henry. What I meant was that I do not believe they will find the fiend."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because of the timing involved. Had he fled to a farther refuge, he would not have been in this vicinity to take the child."

"Frankly, that thought had not occurred to me."

"The monster is infernally clever. That we know. His demonic brain never sleeps. Therefore, with the nearby castle having been searched, could he not possibly see it as a safer refuge than any of the others due for Benet's inspection?"

I regarded my companion with a new eye. "Let us have no more lamentations over your guilt and speak more of your perceptive mind. Such an idea never occurred to me."

"Then you consider it plausible?"

"More than plausible. I see it as entirely likely."

"Do you think Benet would agree?"

"I do not see that it matters. He is not here to agree or disagree. Any decisions based on the assumption are up to us, my dear Felix."

"Are you suggesting that we proceed alone?"

I deliberated for a few moments before answering, then said, "I have been frustrated, even angered, by Benet's attitude toward us, well meant or not. We would only be in the way! We would be but a burden! He regards our presence as a cross he has been called

upon to bear along with his many other obligations."

"I got the impression that you felt put upon."

"Be that as it may, the decision is now ours. I yearn to confront that fiend. And knowing the way to the castle—"

A cry interrupted me. It brought us to our feet and up the stairs into Madeleine's room. We found Genevieve staring in horror at an empty bed.

A moron could have read the signs. The window was open and great muddy footprints made a path from there to the bed and back again.

I seized the candle and ran to the window. The house was so situated that the slope of the hill put the rear closer to the ground than the front. The drop from the window was some five meters, difficult for a normal man. But child's play for the superhuman creature who had come in the night to snatch Madeleine from her bed.

Genevieve, who had endured much, dropped to her knees and began to pray softly. I regarded her with some alarm, hoping that she was not going to become a victim of the hysteria which too many crises can bring on.

She sensed this and raised her head. "Do not be concerned," she said. "I am quite all right. My anguish is for that poor woman."

Reassured, we left her to the privacy of her grief and retired to the lower floor.

"We must alert the village!" Felix cried.

"No," I replied.

"But it would be inhuman to ignore—"

"It would be foolish to send the villagers off on a futile chase. The best hunters are with Benet or off on searches of their own. The responsibility here falls squarely upon us."

"Then let us get to it!"

Thoroughly aroused now, Felix's natural reluctance vanished. Recklessness took its place.

"It would be foolhardy," I countered, "to rush out into the night. Dawn will break soon. I suggest we pack what supplies we will need, see to our weapons, and go forth with first light."

"And if he is not there?"

I could only shrug. "We will have done our best. Our chances of tracking him to any other lair would be nil."

"I bow to your common sense as usual," Felix replied but more in grumbling impatience than otherwise.

So we went about preparing for our pursuit, discussing the while various aspects of the situation.

"Why," Felix asked, "would the monster face the difficulty of kidnapping the woman from her bedroom when he could have seized any other woman more easily in the open forest?"

"Who can say what motives and compulsions drive that fiend? Perhaps she has some vital knowledge of him that could be his undoing."

"Or possibly he marked her for vengeance. As you said, who can fathom the mind of a demon?"

"True. Frankly, I think we should prepare for the worst."

"What do you mean?"

"Only this—if we go forth with any hope of finding either Madeleine or the boy alive, that hope will be dashed. He has certainly destroyed them. Therefore, let us expect nothing. Let us concentrate solely upon the demon's destruction."

"You are right. However, hope does spring eternal."

Dawn was breaking and we were now prepared. Shouldering our packs—the absolute minimum we foresaw as our needs—we slipped from the house, leaving Genevieve to break the dreadful news to the villagers.

. . . Each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard.
. . . The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword.

—Wilde
The Ballad of Reading Gaol

BOOK THREE:

RING OF FIRE

A Savage Crusade

We had little trouble in the beginning as we followed the route over which we had accompanied Benet and his hunters. We moved more slowly without the expert assistance they had rendered, but we made progress and we arrived at the foot of the valley wall below the castle in mid-afternoon.

Nothing had changed. High in its natural fortress of tree and rock and precipitous cliff, the castle stood gray and somber, even in sunlight.

We rested, broke our fast, fortified our spirits with healthy drafts of brandy, and then attacked the perilous slope. We clambered over fallen trees, clung to sharp-edged rocks, and generally risked life and limb for two hours. This brought us to a rushing stream that frothed across our path halfway up the valley wall. We had crossed this chasm before while roped securely to Benet's hunters both fore and aft. Now we had only each other. Roped together, we no doubt

resembled the hopelessly crippled leading the stone blind. But our courage did not falter, which was perhaps a fortunate thing. Had it done so, Felix would possibly have pulled me after him when he slipped from the narrow log we were using as a bridge and plummeted toward the savage rocks below.

I just managed to anchor myself and my rope around the bole of a dead tree. Felix was jerked to a spine-wracking halt just as his feet touched the slippery surface below. Wasting no breath upon words, I slowly hauled him back to where he could get a foothold and then helped him clamber to safety.

As he collapsed onto level ground he cried out in pain. "My wrist! I think it is broken."

"Then we must turn back," I replied.

"Never! We have come too far. Benet faces danger with a single arm! Am I less of a man than he?"

This answer was no surprise to me, being well aware of Felix's courage. I examined his wrist and we decided that it was not broken, only severely sprained. Still, it made his arm useless, so we put a splint upon it and placed his arm in a sling.

By that time it was too late to storm the castle which now loomed close above us. A night in the forest was inevitable.

I built a fire and we made tea and devoured the cold food we had brought with us. Then I laid out our sleeping bags, helping Felix into his. He went to sleep instantly while I heaped the fire higher as a protection against marauding animals and set myself to watch through the dark hours.

Remaining awake was torture. Then, with night having completely fallen, I saw drowsing, wrapped in my greatcoat. My eyes were upon the castle site, as ebon black as the night itself. I stared at it, coming suddenly wide awake. A light! I squeezed my eyes tight shut, to open them again and peer up through the treetops.

It was truly a light. A yellow gleam in one of the castle windows. Our prediction of the monster's movements had been correct!

At first, there was the thrill of success. A feeling of triumph. Then fear washed over—an emotion from deep inside, a manifestation of my instinct for survival. I was glad Felix was not beside me to witness it.

I brushed it aside fiercely and sought to dwell upon the satisfaction of having plotted more successfully than even the experienced and seasoned Benet. Also, I wished fervently that he were with me there in the hostile forest.

I managed to remain awake for an hour or so, but determination surrendered to weariness and my eyelids drooped.

I do not know exactly how long I slept. I do know that a sense of uneasiness assailed me even in the realm of faint consciousness which precedes awakening. Before I opened my eyes I knew something was wrong.

It seemed an age before I could stir my faculties into response. Then they obeyed and I clearly saw a form kneeling beside Felix.

The fire had died down but there was still enough light to show the figure as a maid clad in a daringly

form-fitting costume. A bodice clung tightly to her bosom while black stockings encased her waist to ankle. Short black boots completed her garb.

At that moment, as though by design, one of the smouldering logs split and flared up to reveal the lovely face of the intruder. And regardless of her strange dress, I knew her for whom she had to be.

Max Gregor's tragic beloved—the Larswall maiden snatched from her grave by the fiend to be his mate.

Her face was close to that of the sleeping Felix. She was speaking to him. As I stared, trying to force my muscles to obey me, Felix stirred, no doubt from the soft breath upon his cheek.

I found my voice at that moment and cried out. The maiden's head came up sharply and she knelt there for a long moment like an animal at bay—a frightened deer in the presence of a feared carnivore.

Then she sprang to her feet and fled with such speed that it seemed magical. She had been there, then she was gone.

My cry awakened Felix. He sat up, his eyes heavy with sleep, his mind confused.

"Henry—there was someone here."

I went to his side as he struggled to use his injured arm and grimaced from the pain. "It was a maiden," I cried. "I awoke to find her whispering to you."

"I know. I heard a soft voice but I could not awaken. I felt her hand upon my cheek. I thought it was a dream."

"It was no dream. The monster's captive bride came to us from the castle. She sought our help. Then when

I awakened, she became frightened and ran into the forest."

"We must follow. We must help her."

I shook my head sadly. "It would be no use. She is a terrified, wild thing. As the picture unfolds in my mind, she has three times sought help here in the Chamonix and three times that demon followed her and destroyed the youths she appealed to."

"Then perhaps he is lurking out there in the darkness. Perhaps it was he she saw and fled from, not us."

"That is entirely possible."

"I will stay awake with my hand weapon close by," Felix said. "You must sleep. I shall rouse you if there is danger."

"I doubt if sleep would come to me. My mind is too full of questions."

"Mine also."

"I think perhaps the maiden had our peril in mind. She saw at least one of the youths slaughtered before her eyes. She may have seen my cry as bringing the monster to her side. I think she fled to save us."

"My God, Henry! What a hell she must be living in! Do you suppose she was present when the monster killed her lover on the beach back in the Orkneys?"

"I cannot say. But it is obvious that he keeps a hellish close watch upon her. He was able to transport her clear across Europe without being detected."

"I have long conceded superhuman abilities to the demon. We have no way of judging the—"

My words were choked off. I froze there where I

knelt. The same numbing shock hit Felix as he beheld the spectre at the same minute.

The fiend himself.

We were face to face with him at last.

My brain still worked even if my muscles would not, and I found myself passing upon the various descriptions of the fiend which I had read and heard.

It was my opinion that they did not do him justice. The power of words failed to bring home the repulsive qualities of this gigantic specimen of the living dead. The firelight cast charitable shadows, but even the dimness seemed without power to soften the harsh reality of that death's-head face, those beamlike, mismated arms, the whole general outrage against the human form his hideous body presented.

He stood some thirty feet away, silent, unmoving, only the gray, formless material of his clothing fluttering in the brisk wind which had sprung up.

I fancied that he then prepared for a forward step. This presaged quick annihilation—an end to us. The thought formed in my mind and the message went through my nerves because even without clear thought I seized my bear gun and fired. The ball slammed into the massive chest but if I had hoped to see the monster fall I was disappointed. He shuddered only slightly. An inarticulate sound welled from his chest. Then he was gone. As swiftly and completely as the maiden had vanished, his exodus was still more swift.

So short a time had elapsed between his arrival and departure—actually, it was a period in which time

stood still for us—that Felix and I looked at each other with the same wordless question in our eyes. Had he actually been there?

Felix broke the silence. "It was no hallucination. He stood before us. We saw him. But he was far more horrible than I remember him from my childhood."

"He was not the same?"

"Oh, the same—yes. The identical creature who crouched at my father's feet so long ago. The hellish distortions of nature which produced him could not have been repeated. He is one and the same."

"My ball hit him full center. Why did he not fall?"

"Night shadows are deceptive," Felix replied. "I am inclined to think you missed."

"I am sure I did not."

"But that gun is guaranteed to bring down a full-grown bear. And the monster is not made of ethereal stuff. The material of which he is composed is human."

"Why did he not attack us?"

"He must have been pursuing his captive maid. When he saw that she was not here, he no doubt continued with his search!"

"If that was the case, she may have saved our lives by fleeing from us."

"Do you suppose she witnessed the taking of Benet's son and the unfortunate herb woman?"

"I am more interested in why the monster chose them for his lethal attentions."

"But even more important, from our point of view, is what we propose to do now?"

"I would say that there is little we can do save pile our fire high and remain on the alert."

"We could extinguish the fire and secrete ourselves in the underbrush until daylight."

"I fear that would put us at an added disadvantage. I doubt if we could elude the monster if he chose to return and destroy us. At least with the fire we would be able to see him and put up a fight."

"I wonder what Benet would do under these circumstances?" Felix said.

"I am sure he would hold his ground and face his destiny with a clear eye, no matter the outcome."

"Then we shall do the same. Pile the fire high, my dear Henry. If the monster returns he will know that he does not face a woman or a helpless child."

"Bravo!" I cried, inspired by our display of courage. "We shall stand to our guns."

"And go forward tomorrow."

I insisted that Felix, being of more delicate constitution, try to resume his sleep. He agreed reluctantly and dropped off in a matter of minutes.

Alone to all intents and purposes, I strove for some forecast of what was to come. We had no choice but to advance upon the castle, depending upon our just cause and our force of arms to win the day. The fact that the fiend had vanished with my ball deep in his body put grave doubts in my mind. I preferred to agree with Felix—that my aim had not been true—rather than to contemplate a creature who was impervious to gunfire.

I pondered all the various facets of our situation as

the night dragged on; one far longer than any night had a right to be.

I fought to keep awake. Then I lost the battle and drifted into sleep; a sleep of pure exhaustion where there were no dreams, no phantoms, only oblivion.

I awoke after dawn—to find that Felix had vanished. . . .

In the Place of Horror

So deep had been my slumber that at first I saw nothing wrong. Then came the confusion of finding myself there alone in the forest. Next, in proper sequence, the comforting thought that I was not alone, that Felix was by my side.

But he was not. The place where his sleeping bag had been was as blank as the glade around it. My first flush of fear was diluted by the assurance that he had risen early and was perhaps reconnoitering our position. I held to that thought while I arose and packed my sleeping gear and stirred the fire for embers upon which to build a new flame.

And it was only then that I faced the truth—Felix was nowhere about. Had he been present a fire would have blazed and I would have awakened to the aroma of hot tea. And knowing that he would not have fled voluntarily, I had to face the truth. The fiend had come in the night and carried him away—it was the only an-

swer—with such guile and strength that I had not awakened from my guilty sleep.

True fear swept me now. Fear and despair. What chance was there against such a superhuman creature? Obviously, he saw us not as worthy foes but as contemptible incompetents to do with as he chose, *when* he chose.

My actions, going about the business of making tea, were from pure habit. When one awakens, one makes tea regardless of whatever peril. And as the hot brew scalded my throat, some semblance of courage stilled the panic and allowed me to face the situation logically. But logic posed only questions, not answers.

Why had the fiend returned to spirit only Felix away? Why had he not destroyed us as callously as he had destroyed three youths, a woman, and a helpless child? Why had he left me free to go my way? No reasons for any of these incongruities presented themselves. So I was left to proceed as blindly as ever, with but one honourable course—to go forward. So I finished my tea, the last of such mundane pleasures I might ever experience, and made my preparations.

These were quite simple. The castle lay in such close proximity now that I left the camp as it was, seeing carefully to my bear gun and side arm, stripping away every other impediment.

Then, with the sun coming just up over the forest line, I set out.

Coming close to the castle, I searched for a stealthy way to enter but found none. All was as it had been before—solid, frowning, gray walls save for the main

entrance across what had once been a moat but was now a wide-open path to a partially destroyed door.

I followed that path, every nerve and sinew alert—hoping the monster would appear and thus test my fire power, yet fearing each moment that he would.

I entered the castle, feeling myself to have been gulped into the maw of a great stone beast, finally and irrevocably.

Within, there was only the brooding silence of a place long deserted by human kind, a solitude so dense that I could only lose faith in my own logic and could only doubt the premise which had brought me here. No living thing existed in this castle. The monster was far away. The maiden of our night experience had been only a wraith conjured up in my imagination and Felix's dream. The fiend at which I had fired my weapon had been but a shadow monster formed in my own imagination.

As moments passed and I was assailed by nothing more than the fetid odors of the closed-in chambers about me, that belief became a certainty. And this, the monster's lesser gods allowed, savored for their own amusement, waiting until the conviction was firmly set in my mind before dashing it.

The shattering came in the form of an urgent voice: "This way, good sir! This way! Quickly!"

The fact that the voice was that of a female and was in no way threatening still did not keep me from raising my gun and aiming upward. Then I saw her.

"Madeleine!" I cried. "You are not dead!" My words forming a question rather than a statement.

"Come quickly, I implore you. The danger is great."

My gratitude at seeing a friendly face, where I had expected savage attack, was immense. I ran to the staircase and took the stairs several at a time. But before I could reach her side, Madeleine ran toward the third-level stairway, pausing to beckon once, then hurry on.

I followed, reaching her as she opened a door, glanced about fearfully, and motioned me inside. Relief at finding Madeleine alive and the shock of that same surprise combined to leave room for no greater amazement. Therefore, when I saw Jacques Benet's son also alive, erect, and well, I took it almost as a matter of course. I waited while Madeleine peered out through the half-open door, looking both left and right. Then she closed it and threw the bolt with a sigh of relief.

"I heard you walking below and thought possibly help had arrived," Madeleine said. "I risked leaving the boy to have a look. And even though I instructed him to throw the bolt behind me, I feared that she was lurking about and would use her guile upon him."

Her explanation of course meant nothing whatever to me. It merely increased my confusion. Therefore, I could only react to the more obvious implications of her statement. Speaking perhaps a little stiffly, I said, "Madam, being of aid and assistance is my whole intention."

"Please, sir, I did not mean to belittle you in any way. Your arrival brings great comfort. You must forgive me, however, for hoping that Jacques Benet

and his stout band had come to take full charge of the situation."

"I am the one who should apologize, madam. But we waste time. Inform me—please. This turn of events leaves me completely bewildered. I supposed both you and the lad to have been murdered."

"I can only thank God you are in error."

"I, too, you may be sure."

"His reason for taking me from Jacques Benet's house was to tend the child—or so I thought."

"I do not understand."

"To tend the boy, yes. But also to protect him from *her*."

"My confusion only deepens."

"I cannot fully enlighten you. He tells me little. Only what is necessary. I only know that I must guard the boy while she is away."

"By *she* I assume you mean the maiden he stole from her grave in the Orkneys?"

Her eyes questioned for a moment. "I know nothing of that. I only know of my orders—my duties toward the boy."

"Have you seen the maiden?"

"I have seen a beautiful girl. She stays with him here in the castle."

"I am beginning to understand a part of it at least. He holds the maiden prisoner. She is able to escape, after which he pursues her and drags her back."

After some hesitation, the woman replied, "She does not appear to be a prisoner. Rather the pampered child. A creature of most capricious whim, she pleases,

then tyrannizes him. There is much I do not understand. I know only that she would murder the boy if given the opportunity."

The boy had remained silent. I turned to him. "Is that true?"

He moved toward Madeleine, seeking the comfort of her touch. "When I was first brought here," he said, "she tried to claw me—like a vicious cat. He rushed over and carried her away."

There was a manliness in the boy much to be admired. I could see a great deal of his sire in him.

"Where is the monster now?" I asked of Madeleine.

She replied with a troubled frown. "I hesitate to call him by such a name. He is pathetically ugly, true. But there is much more to him. A terrible inner anguish. He possesses an agony of soul I have never seen in any living creature."

Out of this maelstrom of contradiction and confusion one impression came clearly. Madeleine was a person of far greater depth and character than one would have expected in view of her position and opportunity. Both compassion and loyalty were clearly evident.

"The fiend kills without mercy!" I exclaimed. "How can you judge him higher than a savage beast?"

"I only know that he has been most gentle with us."

Again I turned a questioning look upon the boy. The lad nodded. "He saved my life."

"After cruelly kidnapping you."

A doubtful shrug was my only reply.

"You both seem to forget three of your townsmen were killed without mercy."

"I have not forgotten," Madeleine said. "I can only tell you what I have seen firsthand."

"When I came here, my friend Felix De Lacy was with me. We camped nearby. Last night the monster spirited Felix away."

"I know nothing of that."

"Nor where he is at the moment?"

"He is away searching for her. I am guarding the boy behind that bolted door in case she eludes him and returns."

I was at my wits' end. A man can be put into no more difficult position than to have everything he believes turned topsy-turvy in a matter of minutes. That was the situation in which I found myself. Black was now white and vice versa; truth now falsehood and falsehood truth.

"I cannot believe all that you tell me," I said. "Prior evidence stands too much against it."

"I am sorry," Madeleine replied. "I can only tell you what I have seen—the things I *must* believe on the evidence of my own eyes."

"You have somehow been beguiled by the monster. He is using you as he has used others—for his own purposes."

"I will not deny that. It is obviously his purpose to protect the boy."

"From a gentle maiden who never hurt a living thing?"

"I know nothing of that."

"When will he return?"

"I have no way of knowing. Probably when he finds her."

"And I too must search—for Felix De Lacy—and pray God I will find him alive."

"It would be better that you wait here. I am sure your friend is safe."

"I cannot accept that."

"Then go if you must. I will bolt the door behind you, and be ready to open it again if you return."

Her attitude still amazed me. I said, "Perhaps I will find my friend quickly. If so, I suggest we all leave here before the monster returns."

She shook her head. "I must stay."

"Then you trust him to the point of obeying him blindly?"

"There is too much at stake. The boy's life."

I left the prison room, shaking my own head at the fiend's ability to bewitch those he did not choose to kill. As to other questions—why he wanted the boy—how the woman could be so blind as to see the Larswall maiden as other than a terrified captive—these things I put from my mind as being unanswerable. The important thing was to find and destroy the monster for all time by whatever means possible. That done, all answers would be forthcoming.

I went slowly down the stairs to the second level. All was silence—all brooding ruin and desolation. I planned to start from the bottom, down in the torture chambers, that being the logical place for the fiend to imprison Felix if indeed he had not already slain him.

But I never reached the torture vaults. As I came upon the second level I heard a soft, pleading voice calling out: "Help me! Please help me. I am going mad in this terrible place."

The pleading came from the direction of the luxurious rooms the monster had furnished from his thievery. I hurried thence, my side arm tight in my fist. Then I saw her—cowering in a corner of the first room I entered.

Lenia Amunsen—Max Gregor's dead beloved—the unspeakable fiend's lovely captive resurrected from her grave. . . .

The Dreadful Answer

She was so utterly different from the black-clad girl of the previous night that I was forced to regard her as another person or that whole mysterious incident as an hallucination; something spawned by the tension and physical weariness Felix and I had experienced.

The maiden waiting there to be rescued was as lovely as a summer dawn. The monster's magic had so completely obliterated any taint of the grave that even the story of her return to life was difficult to believe.

She wore a white satin robe. Golden hair fell to her waist, gleaming richly from the sunlight streaming in through the window. As she gazed at me with a mixture of hope and fright, she was a symbol of such flawless purity that all past hardship and danger was forgotten.

I hurried to her side and when she saw that I was indeed a friend she came to her feet and flung herself into

my arms. The slim body under the satin robe was warm with eager life.

"Thank God you've come," she whispered, her soft lips close to my ear.

I pushed her gently away so that I could look into her face. "No one will harm you now, Lenia—"

"You know my name?"

"Of course. I have followed you clear from Larswall."

"Larswall?"

"Where you lived. Where you were bethrothed to Max Gregor."

Her look of bewilderment could not have been more sincere.

"You do not remember the place where you—?" I almost said *the place where you died*, but instinctive caution stilled my lips. "It does not matter now," I said.

"We must leave here before he returns," she urged. "We will go out into the forest—to a place where he will not find us."

"Very soon," I replied. "Very soon. But I am searching for a friend; a companion who was spirited away last night from our camp—"

Lenia's eyes brightened as they darted toward the door like the eyes of a frightened bird. She ran the tip of her tongue over her bright-red lips before saying, "Your friend is imprisoned in the dungeons below. That evil monster brought him here—"

"But why—?"

"To torture him at his leisure. He lives for cruelty. His sole joy in life is torturing and killing."

"Show me the dungeon."

"Come."

In her eagerness to be free of her prison she seized my hand and fairly dragged me down the stairs to the great hall below and then on down into the grisly cavern. The prison cells were along the far wall. We passed the remains of those tortured so long ago and Lenia pointed to one of the heavy doors.

"Felix!" I shouted. "Are you there?"

"Henry! Thank God you have come. How did you find me?"

The voice came but faintly, the thick cell door having only a single small, barred window to admit air.

"Stand easy, Felix," I called out. "I'll soon have you free."

But the promise was more simple than the fulfillment. I realized this as I stared with dismay at the huge lock which held the door fast. It was of mammoth proportions, threaded through two heavy iron rings set solidly into the door and the abutting stone wall. The monster had been most resolute in seeing to it that Felix did not escape.

Whispering so as not to send Felix into deep despair, I said, "It would be impossible to remove that lock!"

Lenia spoke with feverish anxiety as she replied, "Perhaps not. There are heavy steel bars by the forge. You may be able to break it. My strength is not that great."

I went to the forge and brought back the heaviest bar from the set of ancient torture tools and I was gratified that it slipped easily into the curved

retaining part of the lock. Bracing myself, I strained against it. The metal groaned.

"Harder—harder!" Lenia urged. "He may return at any moment!"

There are times when a man is able to transcend his own strength. For me it was one of those times. Gritting my teeth and uttering a prayer, I heaved against the lock. It snapped, the heavier part dropping to the floor with a clang that echoed hollowly through the cavernous chamber.

In a few moments, Felix was free. I grasped his hand. "Thank God you are safe!"

"My joy is beyond words," he cried. "I never expected to hear your voice again."

"If you had come to harm I would never have forgiven myself. Asleep when I should have been watching! You were able to make no sound?"

"He was upon me like a ghost. My injured wrist put me at a disadvantage, but it would have made little difference. The monster handled me like a child." He turned his gaze upon Lenia. "This must be—"

"There is no time," I interposed. "Explanations can come later."

Felix, his pallor showing him less physically fit than he wanted me to believe, passed a hand over his brow. "I do not understand any of this."

"I also—very little of it."

Lenia approached Felix with warm concern, a regard for which he was grateful. She put a tender arm about his shoulders, and he was obviously moved by her youthful beauty and vitality.

With Felix safe my thoughts turned to the others.

"You two must go," I said. "I cannot leave Madeleine and the boy to the mercies of that beast."

Felix's confusion heightened. "What are you saying?"

"They are alive—imprisoned in an upper room."

"Then they must come with us. Nor will we leave without you."

"I will convince her. Either that or I shall bring them out by force." We had reached the great hall with freedom just beyond that massive door. "Wait for me if you must," I said. "I shall not be long," and I hurried up the grand staircase on my rescue mission.

Madeleine admitted me to the prison room and I gave her the fresh developments in as few words as possible. She was uncertain, confused, as she voiced her doubts.

"Even the forest is not safe. He told me that upon no account must I open the door to her."

"Lies! All lies!" I cried. "Deceits uttered for his own purposes. I tell you I have found the maiden and there is no harm in her. Come. Each moment we lose is precious."

She obeyed though reluctantly. We quitted the room and moved toward the staircase. I led the way, the boy clinigng close to Madeleine's side.

We descended, and I now thank God I retained the presence of mind to cry out when the very mastery of my own voice was doubtful.

"Go back! Take the boy! Back to that room and throw the bolt! Remain there."

Madeleine showed admirable control also. I was walking ahead but she got a glimpse of what I beheld.

She murmured, "Oh, my God in heaven!" and turned the boy about with her hands over his young eyes. Then I was alone there on the stairs.

The shock of what I saw there in the great hall never vanished. It remains with me yet. I still see that horrible sight—Felix dead upon the floor. Felix brutally ripped and torn as that hellish she-devil's previous victims had been ripped and torn. Together with the shock came the soul-tearing realization of my own guilt, my own arrogant stupidity, my own abysmal irresponsibility in refusing to listen to those more intelligent than I.

It was all so obvious now. The creature I saw as a gentle maiden was a tigress. That lovely, virginal facade hid a maniacal urge to kill. With her arms about the adoring Felix she was able to attack, as with the others—and reduce him to helplessness before he realized it was happening.

What made the scene below me even more terrible was the hell-cat herself. She still crouched over her victim, the murder knife still in her possession. Those beautiful hands were stained with his blood. There was blood on her mouth from ravening in supreme madness at his throat.

At sight of me a reversion occurred. She dropped the knife and cringed away, smiling weakly—like a child who had been caught with a hand in the cookie jar. Uncertainty swept her. She backed away, her eyes darting about.

With a roar of agony and rage I charged down the stairs. She lunged toward the door but I cut her off. Whimpering now like a terrorized kitten attacked by a

hawk, she fled toward another door. Again I cut her off. She darted away.

Finally, I cornered her between two of the pillars which held up the ceiling of the great hall. Whimpering pitifully, she cowered down. I seized her without thought other than rage and a thirst for vengeance and would have probably killed her on the spot.

But again, I erred. I was careless in my handling of her. Unaware of the phenomenal strength in that beautiful body, I allowed her to twist in my grasp until her face came into proximity with my thigh. With a snarl, she again became the tigress. Her teeth went deep. I cried out from the unexpected pain and she slipped completely from my grasp.

The cumbersome skirt of her robe had been torn away in her struggles with both Felix and me, so she was not impeded as she fled toward the door, her lovely legs flying. Just before she vanished from my sight she turned and emitted a howl of animal joy and savage triumph. Then I was alone with the body of my dead companion.

I covered him with my greatcoat and knelt there beside him overcome by grief and remorse, I know not for what length of time. I know only that during that silent deathwatch I reached the nadir of my worth as a human being.

Then I was not alone. I became aware of this only when a deep, quiet voice touched my ears. "She has been here."

I raised my eyes. "You!"

That single word merged all my emotions. Hatred, anger, accusation. I was only vaguely aware now of the

monster's hideous appearance. What had occurred there, the heinous crime which had taken place, was so much more terrible that the loathesome look of him was of no consequence.

"I am sorry," he said.

He was no doubt sincere, but the expression on that graveyard face—something over which he had no control—was little more than a wicked leer.

I had relinquished my weapon only when rushing toward Felix's body to seize the bloody tigress. Now I snatched it up by way of reply and aimed it full at the monster. The explosion thundered through the castle. He staggered slightly, then remained as he had been—motionless, framed in the doorway beyond, neither angered nor frightened. Behind him, in the frame of open sky, dark clouds had formed as though some baleful force of consciousness beyond our ken sensed the need for a macabre setting.

I waited for the monster to fall. He did not. He merely shook his head in the slow negative and now a trace of sadness could be seen in the obscene wasteland of his features.

"Have done with your violent toys. They have no affect upon me." He looked down at the hole my ball had torn in the charnel flesh of his side. "There is only pain," he went on, "but pain has been my constant companion from the beginning."

I knelt there at a loss, my thoughts chaotic, waiting for I knew not what.

"I am sorry," the monster repeated. "I tried to prevent the tragedies visited upon your kind. I wanted

only peace and some portion of the happiness I felt I had earned. Nothing more."

One can remain at the fever pitch of rage for just so long. Then, even if there is no logical culmination, the mind rejects hysterical emotion and drops into less strenuous areas. In my case it was watchful waiting.

"Be not afraid," the monster said. "I will not harm you."

With that, he came forward. I had thrown my weapon from me as being useless. Now, in sudden close proximity with the terrible, undead creature I had pursued for so long, I shrank away in dread—not so much from fear, as from physical disgust; the same revulsion which would come from handling corpses in a charnel house.

If he noticed this, he paid no attention. He bent over Felix's remains and lifted them in his arms. "Come," he said, and moved toward the staircase. I followed him up onto the second level and into the apartment where he laid the body on the bed. Totally unmindful of the inevitable bloodstains, he turned to a shelf and held forth a bottle. "Brandy," he said.

If I had ever needed the sting of alcohol in my throat, now was the time. I went to the table where he put the bottle and drank deeply, not bothering to look for a glass. As I put the bottle down I turned to see the monster seated wearily upon a stone ledge which ran along one side of the room. His head and shoulders were bowed. His great hands were clasped, his mismatched forearms braced upon his equally mismatched thighs. And in spite of the horror his appearance en-

gendered, he presented a pathetic picture of despair.

I dropped into a chair from actual need of physical support. I was in as strange a mental state as I had ever experienced. It was as though my mind, saturated beyond all capacity, refused to grapple with any more impressions. We sat there in silence, even the grotesqueness of my position failing to stir me to wonder. Then a growl of thunder broke somewhere in the darkening sky and rolled its echoes down the Valley of the Chamonix.

This seemed to stir the monster to life. He raised his great head. "You know of the Orkneys?"

"I do."

"The laboratory?"

"All of it. I found your journal."

He pondered that for a time before saying, "How swiftly the wheel turned! How close to the old turning, this pattern! Long ago, I pursued Frankenstein in this valley. Now you pursue me through these same forests."

"It is more identical than you know. During my days with my friend I learned things concerning Victor Frankenstein—that he came to this land seeking solace from the grief of his existence. I followed in his footsteps, with my own grief—that of my father's passing."

This did not greatly impress the monster. After a time he lifted his head again. "The death of that youth on the beach of Larswall. It was then that the truth was given me to know. Nothing could have been more perfect than our days at the laboratory—"

I thought: *My God! In that charnel house!* But I said nothing.

"—the first days of my existence when her eyes did not look upon me with revulsion." His own eyes were upon me like two burning coals as he spoke, and now I could read his twisted expression as a bitter smile. "When she did not look with loathing as you do now."

"I am sorry. I did not mean to—"

The rest of the apology stuck in my throat and I cried out silently in my heart. What a grotesque situation! Why was I no longer in control of my faculties? Why did I sit calmly listening to this monster? Conversing quietly while the dead body of my dearest friend lay nearby? Why was I not at least laying plans for the fiend's death?

"Then one night," he went on, "she returned to her native island. I followed her with great trepidation, fearing she had recalled her other life and would proceed disastrously. I came upon her on the beach, the same way I had done on the previous encounter when the youth saw her fresh out of her grave. This time, however, she had murdered him, and I knew the truth. My working of Victor Frankenstein's miracle had opened the door for the return to life of a blood-lusting maniac. Her mundane form was not charged with the abstract stuff of primal life, but had been taken over by a creature which had already lived a span on this plane and hovered in the half world beyond, yearning to return."

"And you did nothing?"

Anger flared into his hideous face. The fathomless eyes blazed. "What did you expect me to do? Destroy her? Destroy the only creature who ever looked upon me with favor? What matter that she was all guile and

treachery and nothing of love? A man dying of thirst does not demand pure water. He drinks whatever will soothe his parched throat!"

I was surprised at the bravery of my question. Now, in the face of his rising anger, I held my tongue.

"So I resolved to find the place of seclusion I wrote of in my journal," he went on, "and I knew there was little time. We quitted the laboratory immediately and after weary months of stealthy progress, we arrived here undetected."

"A remarkable feat."

"One I could not have accomplished without the incentive which had been given me. I resolved to protect her from the world and protect the world from her. All I yearned for was the peace and contentment I saw as not beyond my reach."

"But it was not to be."

A great sigh wracked his massive chest. "Not to be. She committed her second murder while I was away thieving the furnishings for this apartment. I found blood on her hands when I returned and got the truth from her. She was so penitent, so abjectly remorseful. Her tears were so genuine."

"Therefore, you were unable to destroy her."

"Oh, you arrogant hypocrites! You sanctimonious liars! You demand so much of those you despise, yet are capable of so little yourselves! Could you destroy the one dearest to your heart, for crime even beyond words?"

"I would certainly see to it that—"

"Silence!" he bellowed in a voice that shook the bed frame. "Your prattling sickens me!"

From that moment on, he seemed no longer to be speaking to me. But rather to himself, to the emptiness of the castle, to the rising storm.

"I tried desperately. I did everything short of putting her in a prison cell, something I could not bring myself to do."

"But still, she managed two more murders."

I heard the words and realized they were my own and awaited his wrath. It did not come, perhaps because he was too weary of spirit to launch more than momentary spurts of rage.

"I tried to prevent them and felt sorrow, but they were not of my doing. They resulted from the Karma of the slain—from the remorseless turning of their own eternal wheels."

"The boy?"

His great hands clenched together and he again seemed aware of my presence. "Once, long ago, I killed a child. That guilt has remained with me. Also, there were two children I recall from long ago."

I was tempted to tell him that one of them now lay murdered on his bed, but it would have been a senseless cruelty to a creature who had already endured too much cruelty.

"I do not know," he went on. "Perhaps I had some mad idea of making amends. Or perhaps it was greed—to have another joy given to humans—that of possessing and nurturing a small, helpless being. At any rate, once I had held the child in my arms I knew I would never relinquish him. He feared me, true, but I would change that. His mind was innocent. He was pliable. I would turn his fear to love and trust."

There was a pause while the sounds coming from his deep chest were a mixture of sobs and laughter. Then he lifted an obscene leer to my gaze. "I am sure you realize," he said, "that one does not have to be human to be a fool."

"Lenia was jealous?" I said.

"She tried to kill him. I told myself she would one day accept him even though I knew I deceived myself. Therefore, vigilance was the order of things and I brought the woman here to be with him at all times."

I was beginning to ponder my own fate. The pathetic creature had been so open with me. He had revealed so much that damned him, it seemed illogical that he would set me free. Why, I asked myself, would he consider my life any more important than those of the youths? He had regretted their deaths, but no more than that. If he chose to destroy me would he not also blame my Karma as he had blamed theirs? It seemed likely.

But then my attention was diverted to the more immediate. Racing footsteps sounded and Madeleine appeared in the doorway. Her blouse was torn. A bloody scratch marred her cheek. "She has the boy!" Madeleine screamed. "In God's name, hurry! He will die!"

The monster swept past us with a speed unbelievable. He had vanished from the room before I was able to move a muscle. I followed him as Madeleine, her strength spent, sank sobbing to the floor.

The attack had taken place in the third-level corridor. The door to the prison room was open and I could

only wonder by what subterfuge the beautiful tigress had beguiled Madeleine into releasing the bolt.

When I reached the scene the boy lay upon the floor. There were deep marks on his throat but he had survived. Too terrified to cry, he was gasping for breath.

Lenia had already reverted to the kitten. With a smile of sweet innocence she was fawning upon the monster, her manner of languorous devotion contradicting all the marks of violence which were apparent.

The monster looked down at her. He neither moved nor spoke. Lenia interpreted this as forgiveness and nestled her cheek lovingly against his thigh. Gently, he reached down and lifted her. He spoke, but briefly. "So it ends." A harsh whisper, but filled with pain.

The agony was most apparent in the ghastly ruin of his face as he placed his coffin hands about her throat and began to squeeze. Realization dawned in her eyes. With the last breath to pass her lips she cried out for mercy. Then, realizing the certainty of her fate, vast hatred and savagery appeared in her straining face. She began fighting desperately, clawing out at him, seeking to reach his throat. He held her away at arm's length where she thrashed and fought and suffered.

A nightmare minute passed while tears streamed from the monster's eyes and it was not difficult to see that his agony far transcended hers.

In the final moments I fancied that I heard a horrendous scream. But that could not have been true unless evil souls departing the flesh are able to shriek in final defiance without natural means of so doing. Then the beautiful body which had been once possessed by unspeakable evil hung limp and dead.

The monster released the body. It fell to the floor. When he spoke his voice was but a monotone beyond hope or despair, love or hate. "Her flesh was delicate. It could not withstand death as does my own foul flesh."

He went back as he had come—to the room where we had left Madeleine. "Look to the boy," he told her.

Forcing her strength to return, she quitted the room and I stood there waiting for whatever was to come.

Perhaps again unaware of my presence the monster murmured, "The only agony worse than a passion for life is a hopeless yearning for death."

He tore his tunic away and looked down at the wound I had inflicted upon him and while thunder rolled and the promised storm broke over the valley, he cried, "Ripped from my chest, that heart would still beat. Cut from this body, my brain could plot even greater madness, nourished as it is from unnatural sources. Is there no way?"

Silence fell upon us, only to be broken by an ear-splitting clap of thunder. This lifted his head and he stared upward for a time. "Born in fire," he murmured. "Perhaps—"

He galvanized into action and when I followed him into the corridor I discovered that he had not descended. Rather, he had sought a narrow upward stairway. Again I followed, to come out upon the roof on a balustrade skirting the river side of the castle. An iron handrailing topped a low wall at its outer edge and when I again caught sight of him, he was tearing a twelve-length of that railing away from its mooring in solid rock.

I went no farther, but stood now watching as he climbed the highest turret of the castle to stand on its peak and point the iron bar toward the heavens like a necromancer's wand.

He was speaking. I could not hear his words but I knew they formed a prayer. The hope which had come into his mind was now apparent. Born of fire, so mayhap to die of fire.

There was no response. Only the howling wind and slashing rain. I was physically unaware of either as I stood there staring upward. It was a time and place where illusion seemed free to mix with reality, so perhaps my vision deceived me. Perhaps it was illusion that he appeared to change. I know only that in my eyes the hideousness of his body was transformed into that of a heroic figure. A flash of lightning illuminated his face and it too was transformed. As though suffering had refined and reshaped it, there came a glowing beauty, a changing of his features into a masterpiece of glowing symmetry.

Then, as though his prayer were being answered, a fantastic bolt of lightning split the sky and came earthward. It seized upon the iron rod, reducing it to molten metal. Instantly, the erect defiant figure was encased in a ring of searing blue flame. Every muscle and tendon strained and I sensed rather than saw the burning of stubborn flesh at white heat.

Then the evil creation of Victor Frankenstein, the body which—I fervently prayed—no longer contained life, pitched downward like a flaming blue meteor into the frothing depths of the Chamonix.

It was finished. The second turning of the Franken-

stein Wheel—and God grant, the final one—had ended.

I stood for a long time there on the balustrade. The storm finished. The wind died. There was silence. I thought of the monster's lesser gods. Had they been amused?

A far-off clap of thunder stirred me to life and I went down into the castle to see after the woman and the boy.

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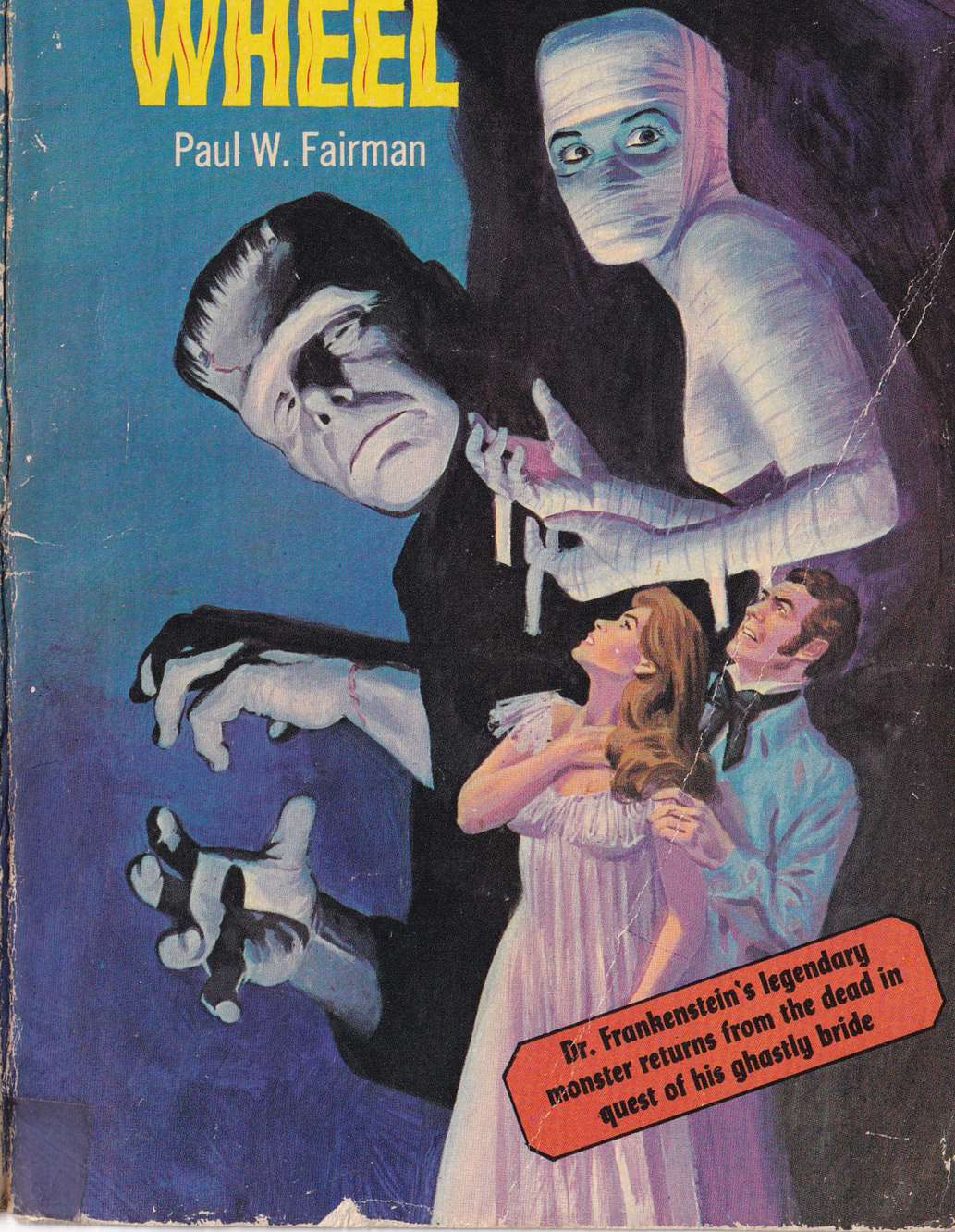

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